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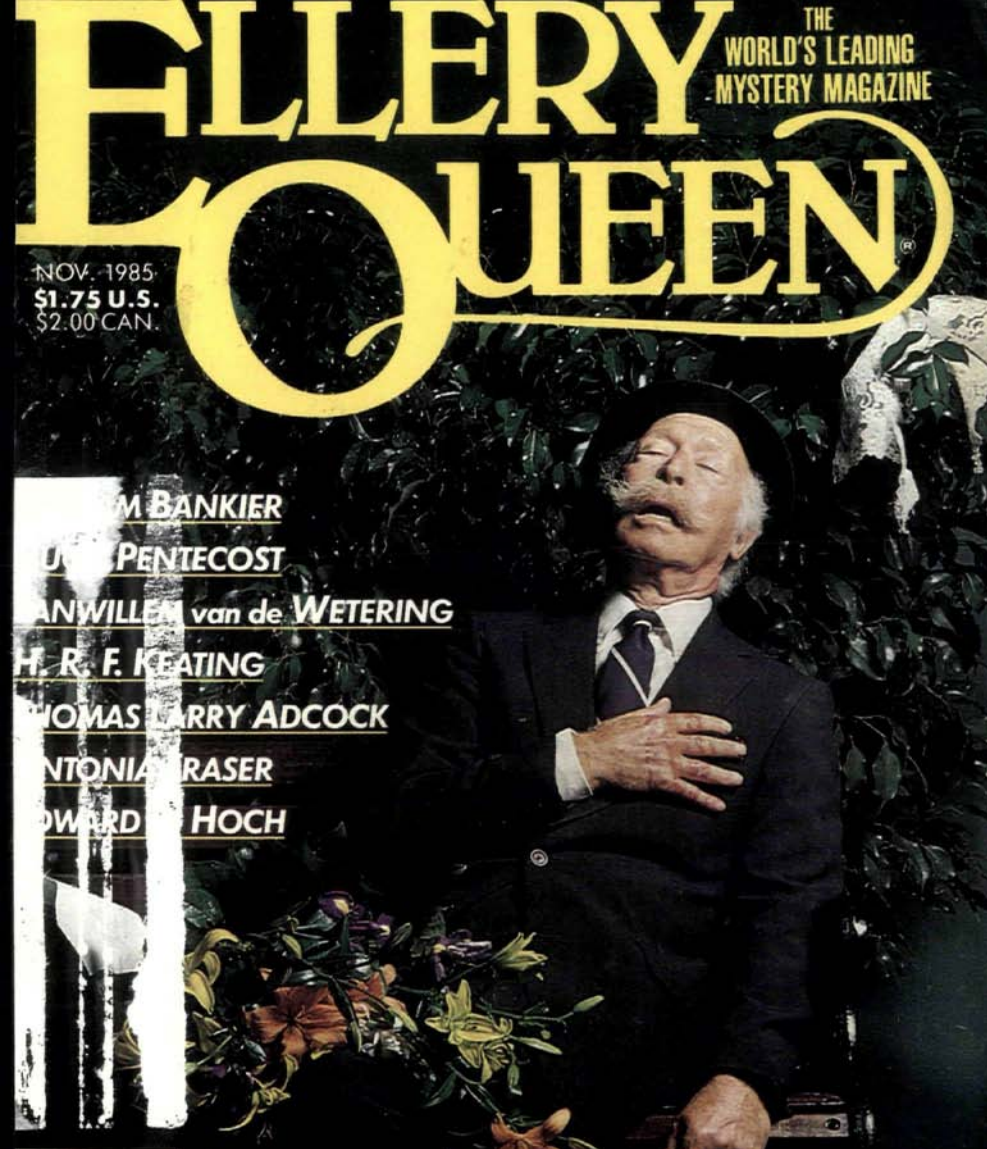

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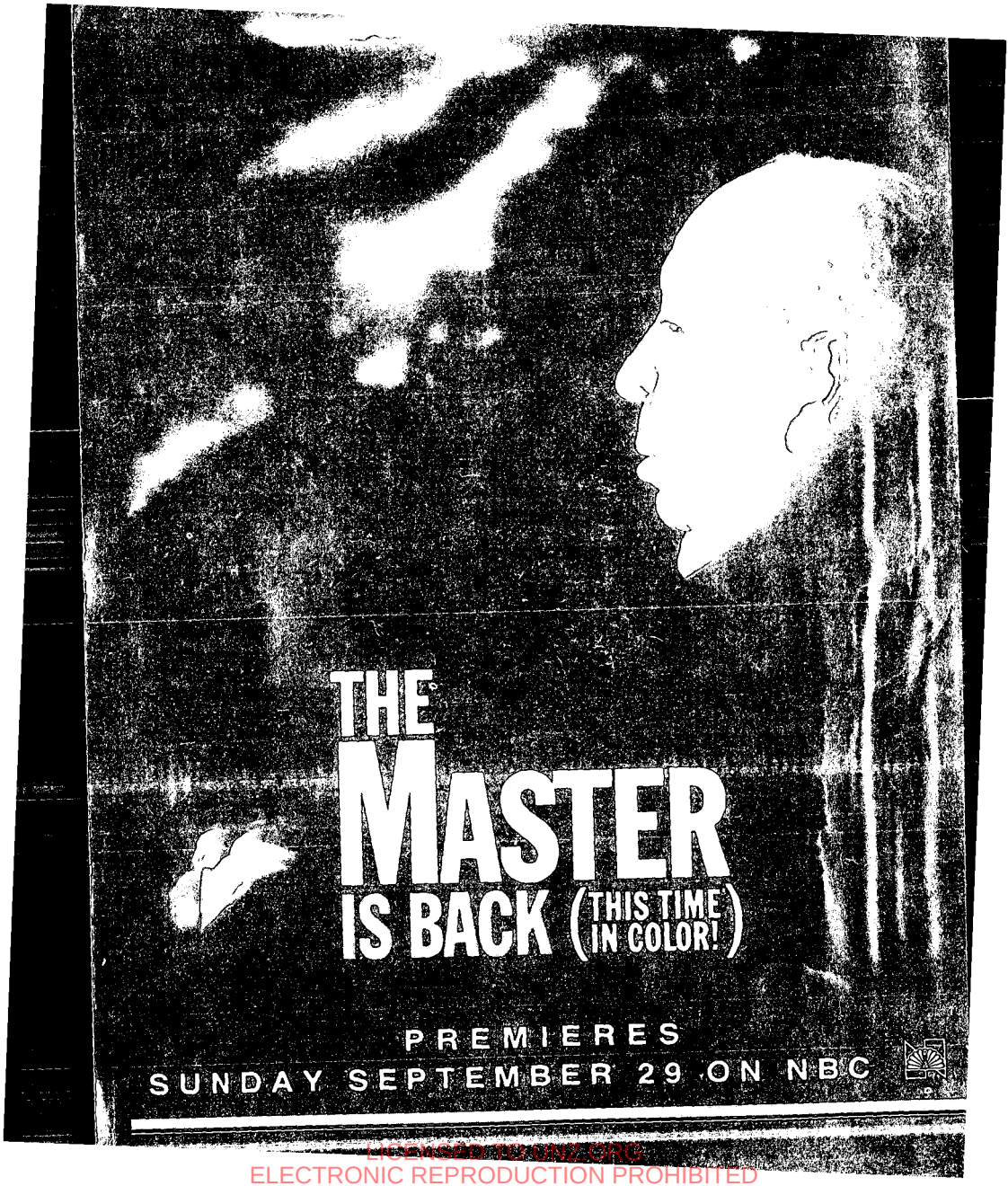

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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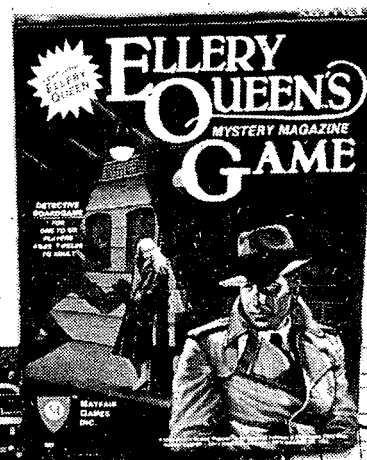

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a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"They tell me your fee is twenty-five grand," Tommy Traylor said.

"It is if I take the assignment," Nick told him. "What do you want stolen?"

"A cardboard castle, the kind children play with."

What was to come for Nick Velvet is one of the most personally perilous of his long and perilous career . . .

THE THEFT OF THE CARDBOARD CASTLE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

During the summer months, Nick Velvet sometimes arranged to meet prospective clients at the yacht club on Long Island Sound where he maintained a membership. This day, seated on the new terrace overlooking the club's marina, he regretted that he hadn't chosen to meet Tommy Traylor at the corner bar. He was a bulky man who moved awkwardly and managed to upset his beer before they'd even begun to talk.

"I guess I'm nervous," Traylor admitted. "It's not every day I hire a criminal to steal something."

"I've never regarded myself as a criminal," Nick responded. "Everything I steal is valueless. I think of myself as being in a service business."

A waiter had appeared from inside to sweep up the broken glass and bring another beer for Traylor. When they were settled down again, he told Nick, "Whatever you do, I want to hire you. They tell me your fee is twenty-five grand."

"It is if I take the assignment. What do you want stolen?"

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"A cardboard castle, the kind children play with."

"Where is it?"

"In the children's playroom at a home on the North Shore." He squinted into the afternoon sun. "Near Glen Cove—just about opposite where we are now. You can sail across and do the job in an afternoon."

"What's so valuable about this cardboard castle?"

"Let's just say I want it for sentimental reasons."

"Is the house guarded?"

"Alarm systems. Possibly a guard. The family's away right now."

Nick nodded. "How soon do you need it?"

"This week, before Saturday. I think the castle might be flying to England over the weekend." He passed a thick envelope to Nick across the table. "There's the address and a floor plan of the house, plus what little I know about the alarm system. And half your fee in advance. Agreed?"

Nick flipped through the contents of the envelope while Tommy Traylor sipped his beer. "Agreed," he said at last.

They reached across the table to shake hands.

It was the sort of thing Nick Velvet had done a hundred times before, and he barely mentioned it to Gloria when he returned home. "It's a job across the Sound," was all he said. "I might even take the boat."

"Can I come with you?" she asked.

Gloria and Nick had lived together for over eighteen years, and for the first twelve or thirteen she'd had no real idea of how he made his living. Telling her the truth about what he did had brought them closer for a time, but then, a year or so back, they'd had a brief separation. Gloria had gone off with someone else. There had been a woman in Nick's life, too, in a way. Her name was Sandra Paris and, like Nick, she was a professional thief. She liked to call herself the White Queen and used a quote from Lewis Carroll, "Impossible Things Before Breakfast," for her motto. She'd wanted to team up with Nick, but he'd rejected the idea. Gloria knew about Sandra Paris, and he sometimes wondered if that was the cause of the occasional tension between them now.

"It's a fairly routine job," he assured Gloria. "I'll simply sail across the Sound and back. I won't even be gone overnight." That seemed to satisfy her and she said no more about joining him. On Wednesday

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afternoon, when he kissed her and left for the marina, she merely said, "Be careful, Nicky."

The trip across was easy enough. He'd been sailing the Sound for years and the sight of him on the water attracted no undue attention from other boaters. The idea of a thief arriving by boat amused him. With the house standing empty, he had no reason to believe the theft of a child's cardboard castle would be quickly discovered or reported, but even if it was, escape by water seemed the most inconspicuous route possible on this sunny August afternoon with so many boats in the water.

He docked at the pier shown on Traylor's map and approached the house with a studied nonchalance. As he'd expected, the grounds seemed deserted. An in-ground swimming pool—a conspicuous luxury this close to the Sound—was drained of water and served only as a resting place for a few dead leaves from the previous autumn. The burglar alarm, still in place on the windows of the big house, proved no problem for Nick. Within ten minutes he stood inside the living room, surveying the rolled-up rugs and the furniture covered with plastic sheets.

According to the floor plan, the children's playroom was at the rear of the second floor. Nick quickly mounted the stairs, moving quietly in his cork-soled shoes. He opened the door at the end of the hall and saw more plastic-covered chairs, along with children's bunk beds, a toy chest, and a table. Assembled on the table was the cardboard castle he sought, garishly printed in red and green and grey, with its pointed turrets rising toward the ceiling. Though it was fairly big, it came apart easily and folded into sections no larger than 8½ by 14 inches.

Somewhere in the back of Nick's mind a troubling thought began to take shape. If everything in the house was packed away and wrapped up for a long absence, why was this single item not only out and fully assembled but virtually on display for him? It was too easy somehow, and when things were too easy he started to worry.

He finished folding the cardboard pieces and started out of the room. Then he froze, staring at one of the plastic-cardboard chairs. It looked as though there was a person sitting in it, his face pressed against the wrinkled plastic sheeting. A man—

Nick took a step closer and lifted the plastic sheet. The man was staring directly at him, but he wasn't seeing Nick. A cord had been pulled tight and knotted around his neck.

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"Freeze!" shouted a voice from the hallway. "I'm a police officer and you're under arrest!"

The detective was a tall, granite-faced man named George Lowndes, who handcuffed Nick and read him his rights in a monotone.

"You're making a mistake," Nick told him. "I came in looking for the owner, Mr. McGruder."

"That's Tim McGruder in the chair, as you well know." He hurried Nick down the stairs.

"I know nothing about his death. I found him just before you arrived."

"You'll have plenty of time to tell your story." Lowndes checked the telephone at the bottom of the stairs and found it working. In a moment he was speaking with the local police headquarters. "I'm out at the McGruders' place. Tim McGruder's been murdered and I have an intruder in custody."

It had been a long time since Nick had been arrested and felt the cold, unyielding pressure of handcuffs on his wrists and he still couldn't quite believe it. They'd realize their mistake soon and release him. But as more police arrived and lab technicians and the medical examiner went about their tasks, he began to have serious doubts.

It all made terrible sense in a way, and the more Nick thought about it the more obvious it became. He heard Detective Lowndes telling his superior he'd received an anonymous call saying a robbery was in progress at the McGruder home. He'd found the window with its cut pane and disabled alarm, entered the house, and discovered Nick with the dead man.

"I didn't kill him," Nick insisted. "He's probably been dead for hours."

Sergeant Steinmitz, Lowndes' superior, shrugged. "The M.E. can tell us about that tomorrow. Meanwhile, you'll be held for arraignment. You're allowed one telephone call when we get to headquarters. Let's go."

They took him to the sheriff's office and the adjoining county jail, where he'd be held. He used his phone call to contact Gloria. "I've been arrested," he told her.

"Oh, Nicky!"

"There was a dead man in the house. They think I killed him. Can

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you get over here with a good lawyer? I'm in the county jail out on Long Island."

"I'll be there as soon as I can."

After the formalities were over, Lowndes asked, "Do you wish to make a statement?"

"I have a lawyer on the way," Nick told him, scrubbing the fingerprint ink from his hands.

When Gloria arrived she was alone. "I called Ralph Aarons. He's the best lawyer I could think of. He said he'd meet us here. —What happened, Nicky?"

Though they were alone in the room, Nick considered the possibility that the place might be bugged. "I think I was set up. The man who hired me tipped them off that I'd be there."

"What about the thing you went to—pick up?"

"It was sitting out for me. The whole thing was just too easy. I should have realized it was a trap."

"But why?"

"To frame me for the murder, I suppose. I don't think it'll stand up in court, but I'm going to be stuck here until I'm arraigned and the judge sets bail."

Ralph Aarons arrived a few minutes later. He was a dapper Manhattan attorney Nick and Gloria occasionally consulted about business matters. He also had a criminal practice and a reputation for smooth-talking many a felon out of what seemed like a certain conviction.

He sat at the table with Nick, a little smile playing about his lips. "I told you one day you'd go too far."

"I didn't kill this man McGruder. I never touched him. He was already dead and in storage, covered with a plastic sheet, when I first saw him."

"If that's the truth, we shouldn't have any trouble beating the murder charge. I assume you have an alibi for this morning and last night?"

"He was with me all the time," Gloria confirmed.

Aarons opened his briefcase and took out a legal-sized pad. The sight of it stirred something in Nick's memory. "Your big problem, Nick, is that they caught you inside the house. You're going to have trouble explaining that away. They're going to dig into your past and discover a number of embarrassing facts. You can't run an operation like yours for nearly nineteen years without a great many

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people knowing about it. Sergeant Steinmitz and Detective Lowndes might never have heard the name Nick Velvet, but other people have."

"Can you get me bail?"

"They won't arraign you until tomorrow after they see the autopsy report. If they decide not to press the murder charge, I should be able to get you released on bail. You have a home and a permanent address."

Steinmitz knocked and entered the room. "Is your client ready to make a statement?"

Aarons glanced at Nick, who answered, "Anytime. I have nothing to hide."

Gloria was sent out of the room and Steinmitz and Lowndes entered with a stenographer. Ralph Aarons moved his chair around the table to sit at Nick's side. When everyone was ready, the sergeant turned to Detective Lowndes. "Let the record show that the arresting officer is Detective First-Grade George Lowndes."

Lowndes took over at that point. "Shortly after four this afternoon I received an anonymous telephone call telling me that a robbery was in progress at the North Shore home of Tim McGruder. I was familiar with the house since my wife and I have been there socially on occasion."

Sergeant Steinmitz interrupted. "How recently was that?"

"We were there one afternoon in June to go swimming in the pool. Shortly after that, we learned McGruder's wife Michelle was leaving him and taking their son with her."

Nick felt a sudden chill at his words. There had been dead leaves in the swimming pool, presumably from last autumn. Lowndes hadn't gone swimming there in June. He was lying. And if he lied about the reason for his visit to the house, he might be lying about anything.

As Lowndes finished his account of finding Nick in the house, Steinmitz asked, "What were you doing there, Velvet?"

Nick figured he could outlie Lowndes any time. "I'd been sailing my boat on the Sound when I was suddenly taken ill, probably from some seafood I'd eaten for lunch. I docked the boat and went up to the house. No one answered the bell. When I noticed the broken window, I went inside. I really felt terrible. I went upstairs to lie down until the nausea passed. When it finally did and I got up to leave, I discovered the body. Just then, Dectective Lowndes appeared, with his *gun*."

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"You entered the house to rob it," Lowndes barked. "Tim caught you and you strangled him."

It went on for another hour before they grew tired of Nick's denials. "Take him to his cell," Sergeant Steinmitz said. "He'll be arraigned in the morning."

"On what charges?" Aarons demanded.

"If the autopsy confirms the time of death as shortly before the arrest, the District Attorney will ask for second-degree murder."

Before they took him away, Nick met briefly with Gloria. "Aarons will get you out," she assured him.

"Sure, if they settle for breaking-and-entering. Murder is something else." He realized he knew nothing about anyone involved, including Tommy Traylor. "Look," he told Gloria, "I need some information." He outlined what he wanted.

"I'll take care of it," she assured him.

In the morning, there was more bad news. Ralph Aarons arrived shortly after ten to inform Nick that the autopsy report placed the time of death at between three and four o'clock. Lowndes had arrested Nick at the scene shortly before four-thirty.

"Our argument will be that the killer phoned Lowndes himself after strangling McGruder," the lawyer told Nick. "But the D.A.'s position is that you could have killed McGruder, searched the house for valuables, and then returned to the body at the time Lowndes caught you."

Nick shook his head. "Lowndes is lying. I'm sure of it. He never went swimming at McGruder's. He went there for some other purpose, and I think he killed McGruder. He probably strangled him just before I arrived. When he heard me downstairs, he covered the body with that plastic sheet, hoping it would go unnoticed. When I did discover it, he appeared with his gun to arrest me."

"That's all conjecture, Nick. You can't accuse a police officer of murder without good solid proof."

"What about that phonecall? They must keep a log of calls. I'll bet there *wasn't* one to Lowndes around four o'clock! I'll bet he wasn't even here at four! I'll bet he was out at that house killing McGruder!"

"I'll check it out. Meanwhile, I don't believe we should volunteer any information about your dubious career. The less they know, the better for you."

"Where do I stand, then?"

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"You'll be arraigned this afternoon and held for grand-jury action. I may not be able to get you free on bail quite yet."

"So I stay in jail?"

Aarons nodded. "For the moment. I'm working on it."

Gloria arrived an hour later. "I talked to Aarons," she said. "If he can't get you out, I'll find somebody better."

"Don't worry about it."

"I want you home, Nicky."

"I will be. They'll never make this murder charge stick. Tell me what you found out about McGruder."

"It wasn't hard to do. The morning papers are full of his murder. It seems he was president of a medium-sized Long Island bank that was recently investigated by the government. The bank was making large transfers of cash to Swiss banks without reporting it as required by government regulations. There was a suspicion the bank was laundering money for drug dealers or organized crime. The board of directors dismissed McGruder as president a few months back—that's when his wife left him. The newspaper theory is that he might have been killed by a hit man for the mob."

"They think I'm a hit man?"

"Maybe that's why Aarons couldn't get you released on bail right away. Don't worry—the truth will come out."

"That's what I'm afraid of. By the time they decide I'm innocent of the murder charge, they might find out too many other things about me."

Nick's court appearance was postponed one more day, until Friday, and he went to bed that night feeling more depressed than at any time since his arrest. Aarons had sent word they couldn't expect bail to be granted before the following week at the earliest. Gloria had been unable to get a line on Tommy Traylor, and Nick knew it was doubtful that his erstwhile client would come forward. He began to consider the real possibility of serving a lengthy prison sentence.

He was awake again at dawn, listening to his fellow prisoners moving around in their cells, preparing for another day. Gloria had brought a suit from home for his courtroom appearance, but for now he dressed in the faded grey shirt and trousers issued by the prison.

A matron wearing slacks, shirt, and a peaked cap intercepted him on his way to breakfast with the other prisoners. "Nick Velvet!" she called out. "Which one is Nick Velvet?"

"That's me," he acknowledged.

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"Come with me. Your lawyer wants to see you."

Nick left the line of prisoners and walked down the corridor at her side, then turned left with her down an empty corridor that led to the stairs. They were passing a women's rest room when suddenly the matron slammed against him hard, pushing him through the door.

"What the hell?"

"Quick—get into these clothes!" she ordered.

For the first time his eyes focused on her face. "Sandra Paris!" he gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"Helping you escape from jail. Impossible things before breakfast, remember?"

In their two previous encounters, Nick Velvet and the White Queen had been more or less on opposite sides of the fence, each pursuing their own goals. It was difficult for Nick to accept her help now, but it was his only way out. He didn't bother to consider the consequences of a jailbreak. He quickly dressed in the guard's uniform Sandra supplied, then followed her once more into the corridor.

Five minutes later, they were outside, in her car, through the gate, and heading west toward Manhattan. "How did you pull that off?" he asked in amazement.

"A little bribery and a lot of luck."

She'd taken off the ugly peaked cap and he had an opportunity once again to admire her long blonde hair as it fell around her shoulders. "You astonish me," he admitted. "I was just about resigned to spending the next few years in a prison cell."

"I wouldn't let you do that, would I? Don't you remember I once suggested that we team up as partners?"

"I remember."

"So what were you working on when you got grabbed? I know you didn't go there to kill McGruder."

"Did you know him?"

"Mostly by reputation. A wealthy banker who was making money on the side. I met him one Sunday last summer at a champagne brunch out in the Hamptons."

Nick shook his head. "I travel in the wrong circles. I never meet people like that."

"We operate in different ways," she told him. "Sometimes I think it's just a game with you, the crazy things you steal. It's not a game

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with me. I'm in it for the money. What crazy thing were you hired to steal from McGruder's house?"

"A cardboard castle—a plaything probably abandoned by his son when McGruder's wife left him."

"I met her briefly at that brunch," Sandra said. "She's a handsome woman, much younger than he was. I think her name was Michelle. Maybe she had a hand in his death."

"I've got my own suspect for that."

"Who?"

"The detective who arrested me—Lowndes. He lied about his reason for visiting McGruder earlier in the summer. They might have had a business deal involving some laundered drug money." He stared out at the morning rush-hour traffic along Queens Boulevard. "I just wonder where Tommy Traylor fits in."

"Who's he?"

"The man who hired me. He knows why that castle is valuable. At first I thought he might have set me up to take the rap for the murder."

"You don't think so any more?" Sandra asked.

"I need to see him again."

"I have an apartment in Manhattan. That's where we're headed, so you can get out of that guard's uniform and into something a bit less noticeable. You can try calling him from there if you want."

The number Traylor had given Nick was connected to a telephone answering machine. As he listened to the recorded message, Nick glanced around at Sandra's small but expensively furnished apartment overlooking the East River. Business must be good for the White Queen, he decided, and then spoke into the phone. "This is the fellow you hired for that dredging work on the Sound. I'm calling to—"

Traylor's voice broke in. "I'm here, Nick. I just wasn't taking calls. I heard about you on the news."

"I have to see you. I've got questions."

"Do you have the merchandise?"

"Not yet."

"Look, Nick, you're a bit hot right now. I can't risk meeting you. Can't we do this over the phone?"

"Not if you're recording it."

"I'm not. The machine's off and the phone's not tapped. You can speak freely. Did you kill McGruder?"

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"No," Nick answered. "Did you?"

"No. I had nothing against the guy. I just want my money."

"What money is that?"

"The stuff in the Swiss bank account. McGruder transferred it for me. It's my own money. I'm not trying to steal it."

"Go on."

"There are legal documents involved with Swiss bank accounts, especially when there's a transfer of funds from an American bank. McGruder's bank was laundering a little money for me and some of my friends. The government finally caught on and started investigating. The bank's board of directors fired McGruder a couple of months back and when that happened this last batch of money got caught in the pipeline. McGruder claimed there was nothing he could do because he was no longer with the bank, but I knew better. He was planning to fly to Zurich this weekend with the necessary documents, withdraw the money, and live comfortably somewhere in Europe or South America until the statute of limitations ran out."

It was all falling into place for Nick. He remembered Ralph Aaron's legal pad and what it had almost triggered in his mind. Legal pads, and legal documents, were 8½ by 14 inches—the same size as the largest pieces of the disassembled cardboard castle. "The documents are printed in invisible ink on the back of those cardboard pieces," Nick said, as if he'd known it all along.

"You've got it—they include the secret account numbers and everything, all that's needed to withdraw the money. Tim McGruder was a great talker. Once after a few drinks he told me about it. He and his wife made the flight to Zurich two or three times a year."

"His wife. Michelle?"

"Yeah. They split up after he got fired."

"How'd you know he was flying to Zurich this weekend?"

"His secretary tipped me off. He had her make two reservations for Friday night, with a stopover in London. That's tonight."

"Two? Who was he planning to take?"

"Beats me. When you're on your way to empty out a Swiss bank account, I suppose there's no lack of traveling companions."

"When I got there, the cardboard castle was sitting out," Nick said, "as if I was expected to steal it."

"He was expecting someone else—the guy who killed him. You just walked in at the wrong time."

"Yeah," Nick agreed. "That's for sure."

"What are you going to do now?"

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"Do? I'm going to finish stealing that cardboard castle for you."

The White Queen sat regally in a big armchair, her back to the river, and listened to Nick talk. "I'm more certain than ever that McGruder was killed by George Lowndes," Nick told her. "I think he's flying to Zurich in McGruder's place, to empty that bank account."

"You do jump to conclusions, Nick."

"I know how I can prove it. Do you have any connections with the airlines? Traylor said McGruder was planning to fly there tonight, with a stopover in London. He'd booked two seats. There can't be more than a dozen overnight flights from New York to London. If we could learn the airline, his flight number, and whether the tickets have been cancelled—"

"Why would Lowndes take his place?"

"If he stole the cardboard castle himself, he'll be anxious to get his hands on the money."

"He's probably more anxious to get his hands on you. He won't go running off while you're at large."

"That's exactly what he would do, before I'm recaptured and they need his testimony for the grand jury."

Sandra Paris thought about it and finally nodded. "I'll get busy on it."

"Got any food in this place? I never did eat breakfast."

"Look in the refrigerator while I make a few calls."

He had a sudden thought. "I'd better phone Gloria."

"No! The police could be tapping your line."

Nick made a cheese sandwich and ate it with a bottle of beer. By the time he'd finished, Sandra had completed her calls. She came into the kitchen smiling. "I played secretary and called till I hit the right flight. Mr. and Mrs. McGruder are still booked on the 8:30 departure from Kennedy to London, continuing to Zurich on Monday morning."

"When the banks open."

"Exactly." She uncapped a beer for herself. "If your Detective Lowndes is leaving on that flight, he must be making preparations."

"I was just thinking the same thing," Nick said. "I was thinking there might be a way to steal that cardboard castle at the airport."

"From his luggage?"

"He wouldn't risk checking it through, not after he committed

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murder for it. He'll have it with him, in a briefcase or carry-on bag." He had an idea. "Do you have an instant camera of some sort?"

"I've got an old Polaroid I use occasionally."

"Good. I want you to go out to Long Island and get a picture of Lowndes, preferably with whatever kind of case or bag he'll be carrying on the plane. We may want to duplicate it if we can."

"But how will I know which is the right one?"

"It has to hold eight-and-a-half-by-fourteen-inch pieces of cardboard. That rules out most airline flight bags. Look for something with hard sides, like an attaché case."

She was back by four o'clock, flushed with triumph. "I posed as a reporter. I phoned and asked him for an interview next Monday, but he told me he'd be away. I waited outside where he wouldn't spot me. He left headquarters early, carrying a black attaché case, just as you predicted. Here's a picture of it."

Nick studied the photo of George Lowndes unlocking his car door, carrying an inexpensive imitation-leather case.

"One thing," Sandra said. "His initials are on the top in those stick-down metallic letters. GPL. See, you can just make them out in the photo."

"That shouldn't be hard to duplicate."

"You're going to bump into him and exchange cases?"

"Hardly. He'd recognize me and yell for the nearest security guard."

"Then how—?"

"I'll explain later. Let's find a copy of this case first."

They tried three stores in midtown Manhattan before they located an identical attaché case. The metallic letters were easy to duplicate, but Sandra had another question. "What about the weight? If we do a switch he's sure to notice it's heavier or lighter."

"We'll put a couple of newspapers inside and hope for the best. He's not likely to try to board the plane with anything really heavy, like a gun. Chances are it'll contain nothing but the cardboard castle and some reading matter for the trip. Even if it feels odd, the initials on the top should reassure him."

Back at her apartment, Sandra asked, "How do we make the switch?"

"There's only one place at the airport where the attaché case will be out of Lowndes' grasp—passing through the X-ray machine at the security check. If you could get a uniform and take the place of

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the girl operating the machine, you could make the switch as the case passes through. There's a narrow space inside the machine on either side of the conveyor belt where the duplicate case could be stored until Lowndes appears."

Sandra was dubious. "There are usually two people on the machine, plus a security guard not far away. It would be hopeless to make the switch without being seen. Besides, I couldn't make a quick getaway with the case while there was a line of people waiting. If he discovered the switch before the plane left the gate, I'd still be there, waiting to be caught."

He had to admit she was right. Too many things could go wrong. "It's nearly five o'clock. We haven't much time to come up with a better scheme."

"I might have something here," she said, going to a closet and returning with a medium-sized suitcase. "This is a booster bag, a device popular with professional shoplifters. See, the bottom is hinged in two sections. You set it down directly over the object you want to boost and then pick it up with the stolen goods inside. I've modified this one to make exactly the sort of switch you have in mind. You release the substitution and pick up the original so smoothly it would be noticeable only if someone was looking for it to happen. I used it once to steal the blueprints of a new auto plant from an architect's office. By the time they discovered the substitution, I was on a plane back to New York."

"It might work," Nick agreed, "if he ever takes his hands off the case."

He'd always admired Sandra's resourcefulness, and as they drove to Kennedy Airport he was confident she could bring it off. "He doesn't know me," she reasoned. "I can just stand or sit next to him in the lounge and wait for my opportunity."

"If you bring this off, you'll get a share of my money from Traylor."

"Of course. I told you I don't work for free."

At the airline's departure building, the waiting began. As six-thirty passed, and then seven o'clock, Nick began to worry. "I don't think he's coming."

"There's still over an hour till flight time."

"They tell passengers to be here an hour early for overseas departures."

It was Sandra who finally spotted Lowndes, getting his seat assignment. "There he is."

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The detective turned from the counter carrying the black attaché case. He was immediately joined by an attractive auburn-haired woman who took his arm. Sandra gave a little gasp. "Who's that?" Nick asked.

"McGruder's widow, Michelle."

"That explains a lot. Lowndes visited the house to see her. She must be the one who tipped him off about the cardboard castle. Maybe it was even he who caused the breakup of her marriage. She sent him there to steal the castle and probably to kill McGruder while he was at it. Maybe she's the one who made the plane reservations in the first place, not her husband's secretary."

"Problem," Sandra said. "I met Michelle McGruder at that party I told you about. She might recognize me and start talking. Then how do I make the switch?"

"Try it and see. If she does recognize you, I'll create some sort of diversion."

He watched from behind the newspaper he had brought with him as Sandra approached the row of seats where Lowndes and Mrs. McGruder waited. Just before she reached them, another passenger took the only vacant seat by their side. He could feel Sandra's frustration, especially when a voice over the public-address system announced, "Flight 223, eight-thirty departure for London's Heathrow Airport, will begin boarding in five minutes. Please have your boarding passes and passports ready for inspection."

Five minutes and the castle would be beyond Nick's reach.

He saw Sandra switch tactics and walk right up to them, carrying her trick suitcase. She said a few words to Michelle McGruder and the auburn-haired woman's face brightened. She smiled, extending her hand, as George Lowndes got politely to his feet. His black attaché case was on the floor by his legs.

Nick turned away, almost afraid to watch. When he looked back a few seconds later, Sandra had maneuvered Lowndes away from the attaché case and lowered her suitcase into position. Ten minutes later she joined him. "You got it?"

"Of course I got it," she answered with a smile. "Right in here. They didn't suspect a thing, once I reminded Michelle that we'd met in the Hamptons. I had to stay around until they boarded the flight, but Lowndes picked up the attaché case without noticing a thing."

"Good thing you didn't have to go through security with this suitcase of yours. It might have looked odd on the X-ray machine." He took it from her as they started toward the exit.

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And found Sergeant Steinmitz blocking their path.

It was the sergeant who recovered first from his surprise. "What are you doing here, Velvet? Are you trying to flee the country, too?"

At Nick's side, Sandra had frozen, waiting for an indication of their next move. Nick was ready to knock the man aside and make a run for it, but something in Steinmitz's attitude made him hesitate. "Hello, Sergeant," he said. "Good to see you again."

"There's a warrant out for you. Jail-breaking, unlawful flight to avoid prosecution." He motioned to a policeman who was with him to watch Nick. "I'll talk with you as soon as I take care of George Lowndes."

"Lowndes." Then it dawned on Nick. "You came here looking for Lowndes? He's on that plane to London!"

"I know. It won't be leaving the gate."

"You know he killed McGruder?"

Steinmitz nodded. "We've got a pretty good case against him. Evidence of an affair with McGruder's wife. And he made a sloppy attempt to change the log of phone calls at headquarters to back up his story of that anonymous call reporting a burglary. There was no such call, and he wouldn't have been there to receive one anyway. We have a witness that he left headquarters at three, and one of McGruder's neighbors saw him arrive out there at three-thirty. He killed McGruder and when you entered the house he figured he could frame you for the murder."

"Then I'm off the hook?" Nick asked.

"Not completely, but I think we can get the escape charges dropped if you sign a paper promising not to sue for false arrest. There's no evidence you took anything from McGruder's house. Can I trust you to come see me in the morning?"

"Of course," Nick said. "I'm not crazy."

They stayed long enough to see Lowndes and Mrs. McGruder being escorted from the plane. Then they headed back to Sandra's car. For the first time in days, Nick could relax. "I'm in the clear and we've got the cardboard castle for Traylor. I guess Steinmitz never knew about that part of it."

"I told you we'd make a great team."

"I won't forget what you did, rescuing me from jail."

She headed north on the Van Wyck Expressway, toward the bridge

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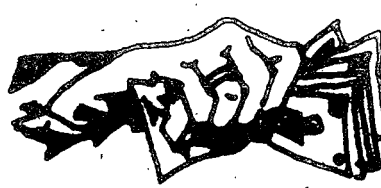
that would take him back home. "There's something I should have told you sooner, Nick."

"What's that?"

"You know it's not a game with me. I never pull off a caper except for good hard cash."

"So?"

"Gloria decided your lawyer wasn't doing enough to get you out. She hired me to spring you. I'm taking you there now to collect my fee."



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a *NEW* short story by

THOMAS LARRY ADCOCK

In the July issue, Allen J. Hubin's Jury Box review of Thomas Larry Adcock's Precinct 19 *(published by Doubleday) rated this "vivid interweaving of a host of evocative vignettes based on actual incidents in New York's Upper East Side" as excellent. This is Mr. Adcock's first story in* Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. *He has been a police reporter for the Detroit* Free Press *and has also written for* Minneapolis-St. Paul Magazine, *the Minneapolis* Star-Tribune, The New York Times, *the Toronto* Telegram, *and* Chicago Today. *He lives in Manhattan with his actress wife.*

The color of the necktie would have exactly matched the color of The Mister's eyes, had they been open. The fringe of thick black and grey hair had been lightly oiled by Lyle Gant, the undertaker, and now looked silvery and almost distinguished. Uncharacteristically well groomed as he was, however, The Mister still looked like he wanted a drink . . .

THE MISTER'S FUNERAL

by THOMAS LARRY ADCOCK

The man in the coffin was named Henry Colfax. For the first seventeen years of my life, I'd known Henry Colfax as "The Mister." He was my father.

He wore a navy-blue suit and a slightly lighter blue necktie, which had been permanently borrowed for the occasion from a neighbor called Slim who had no more use for such a costume than the deceased.

The color of the necktie would have exactly matched the color of The Mister's eyes, had they been open. His fringe of thick black and

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grey hair had been lightly oiled by Lyle Gant, the undertaker, and now looked silvery and almost distinguished. Lyle had also been thoughtful enough to clip away most of the black bristle that always sprouted from my father's nose and ears.

Uncharacteristically well groomed as he was, however, The Mister still looked like he wanted a drink.

A man wearing a red-flannel shirt, yellow suspenders, and denim overalls leaned on the edge of The Mister's pine box and stared at the deceased through a pair of bottle-thick spectacles. An insect's remains made a tiny stain at the bottom of the right lens, as if some hapless mosquito had collided with an automobile windshield. This man's name was Dennis Dooley, though he was almost never called by his Christian name due to his dimwitted cheerfulness and due to The Mister's fondness for jokes at other people's expense.

Mr. Dooley—"Dog Brains Dooley"—tended bar at a place called Nappy's, which was preferred by the deceased over the other three municipal taverns in town, which together remain to this day the chief sources of revenue for the village of Island Notch, Vermont.

About twenty-five years ago, The Mister dubbed Dennis Dooley "Dog Brains" and it stuck. It was a Saturday morning and my father walked through the front door of Nappy's with his usual companions, a red-and-brown mongrel dog about the size of a sheep and a .22-caliber rifle which he used mostly to pick off squirrels.

The Mister took a stool at the end of the bar, which had filled up with the usual contingent of weekend hunters and their guns. The dog scampered back behind the bar and for some reason stood up on its hind legs right next to Dennis Dooley, its paws gripping the wet mahogany and its big woolly head peering across the length of ash-trays and pilsner glasses at The Mister and his cronies.

The dog's tongue hung out slightly. So did Dennis Dooley's tongue, which was perfectly natural, since Dennis had to breathe through his mouth due to nasal problems. Even The Mister hadn't ever noticed how amusing Dennis Dooley's respiratory problem could be until he saw how Dennis was sort of panting side-by-side with the dog.

The Mister winked at his pals and they silenced. Then he spoke to Dennis as he always did, louder than necessary and very slowly, the way Dennis talked himself: "Say there, Dooley, I see you got your cousin with you to help out on your busy day." The onlookers sniggered into their beer in anticipation of what Dennis might say in response.

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Dennis focused his eyes on The Mister's finger, which pointed to the dog behind the bar. He raised a hand to the hearing-aid planted in his right ear, which was Dennis's habit whenever anyone spoke to him so loud, and then he noticed the dog. It took Dennis a couple of seconds to figure out what to say to The Mister. He wanted to get it right because he could hear the laughter welling up around him and, although he didn't understand the reason for it, he didn't want to say anything that would make them laugh more. Finally he said, "This ain't my cousin, Henry, it's your old dog."

The Mister pounded a fist on the bar and all the glasses rattled. Dennis thought for a minute that someone had fired off a shot. He reached below the very section of the bar then occupied by The Mister and fingered the .38-caliber revolver he kept handy. But then he realized that all the commotion was just another joke on him. The Mister and all his other customers were laughing hard.

"This ain't—this ain't—" my father repeated, mimicking Dennis's words, "—this ain't my *cousin!* It's your old *dog!*" The hunters hooted themselves red in the face and spilled a lot of beer.

"Dog Brains!" my father hollered above the merry din. His thumb was cocked at Dennis, who stood grinning behind the bar next to the red-and-brown dog, whose barking seemed a lot like a laugh, too. Dennis joined in himself.

The Mister considered this event a masterpiece in his many years of making fun of Island Notch and its people. After a decade or so of retelling the story of Dog Brains' name, my father even managed to teach Dennis to tell it on himself.

Four days ago when my father last came to drink at Nappy's, it was Dog Brains Dooley who first noticed that the dearly departed had slipped off a barstool and died.

Dog Brains turned his sights from the uncommonly dapper remains of The Mister to us surviving Colfaxes assembled around the coffin. There was my mother, who had lost a little weight but seemed otherwise her same old self, my younger sister, and me. We sat on folding chairs with stenciled lettering on the backs: Lyle Gant Funeral Chapel.

"He'd just come back outta the woods—"

Nobody had asked Dennis to recount the last minutes of The Mister's life, but for some reason he felt compelled to spare us no detail, especially what with my sister and I having come all the way from New York for the affair. So he stood there between us and the open

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casket and talked. My mother listened attentively, though she'd heard the story before. She held a handkerchief and an instamatic camera with a flash bar in her lap.

"—after mushroomin', you know? Said he was hungry as hell, so I get him a ham sandwich and a bottle of Moosehead. I was pret' busy just then washin' dishes and the radio was goin' pret' loud, so I don't notice no noise like a body fallin' to the floor. But when I go to see if Henry needs another Moosehead or anythin', well, he wasn't there and neither was the stool. Then I figure he's down on the floor.

"Old Henry's been down on the floor lots of other times in this place," Dennis continued. He meant Nappy's, not the funeral chapel. "You all know he likes his stuff all right, but this time he's layin' there on his back and his face is blue, which don't look right to me.

"Slim walks in just then and says Henry's prob'ly croaked, prob'ly from the sandwich. I don't know about that, but anyways Slim helps me lay Henry out on the pool table when we can't get him to stand on his feet. He wasn't breathin' much on the table, so Slim goes runnin' off for Hilda."

Dennis looked at Hilda, my mother, who didn't say anything. Then he continued:

"Henry never did get no phone up ta his place, so Slim hadda run, leavin' me here alone with Henry. In just a couple minutes, though, Hilda's down ta Nappy's and she touches Henry different places and puts her ear on his heart and says, 'Welp, he's dead, all right.' "

Dennis pulled off his spectacles and pinched his nose, then patted my mother's shoulder and walked off. The wake seemed pretty much over, such as it was. Slim came up to us from somewhere in the back of the chapel and said to my mother, "Real sorry, Miz Colfax. I'm surely goin' ta miss him."

Then Lyle Gant, small and waxy-faced and dressed in a black suit, asked my mother what else he could do for us that night before the burial next morning. Mother handed him the instamatic.

My sister and I flanked our mother around the head of the casket, which was one of those models with the upper hatch open to show the deceased's hands crossed over his stomach. Lyle stood on a chair and before he snapped our final family portrait my mother said to him, "You gotta leave some room on the left side of the viewfinder 'cause the cheap thing's whacked outta shape." She promised each of us a five-by-seven print.

Outside Gant's, I smoked a cigarette while my sister and mother

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finished up thanking the people who'd come to the wake. There had been about a dozen of them, people I hadn't seen in better than twenty years, people I'd forgotten all about the minute I finally got out of town and on my way. The Mister's buddy, Slim, came up to talk to me. I gave him a cigarette.

"Your old man and me were closest of any two here in town," he said. He smelled of rye. "I can tell you, he knew you all hated his guts, 'specially you. And you got the right, all of you, that's sure. But since he was your old man, you should try and understand him."

Slim took a long drag off his cigarette. I wanted very badly to return to New York.

"He was a miserable guy, your old man," Slim said. "Hard on himself and hard on this town. He told me lotsa times how he wisht he had your brains so's he could get the hell out like you done.

"Welp, he was about as big and dumb as they come 'round here, so he hadda stay. So maybe he wasn't much of a man by your lights. I can see that. I mean, I know the things he done to you and your little sister and I don't make no excuses for it on his account. But 'round this little place, there was a certain respect for him, believe it or not."

Slim had a small coughing fit, which he followed up with another long drag on his cigarette. I thought about just walking away from him. He moved between me and the funeral-chapel door, as if he'd read my mind. "Your old man," he went on, "was one of the few old boys here who wasn't beaten down. Know what I mean? Take a look at ev'rybody else and you'll see faces just as dead as your old man's back there.

"Welp, your old man figured there was more ta life and the world than just grunt work and takin' orders from the damn priest and makin' babies and gettin' drunk on Sattidys."

My mother and sister came out of the chapel just then, the perfect excuse to end it with Slim. "Thank you," I said to him. But the way I said it, it meant "Get lost."

I left Island Notch when I was seventeen and still stupid. I left on the occasion of my broken arm, which was the result of discipline administered by my father.

The village was about the same then as it was now. The four saloons hugged the single intersection; Saltweidel's Store and the post office and the Island Notch Liberty Bank formed the west side of what people called "downtown"; Ferguson's filling station, a feed

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store, the hardware, and Gant's Funeral Chapel made up the east side. Above Gant's was a three-room apartment that used to be rented by a two-hundred-pound whore known to carry a switchblade knife. The Island Notch Creamery and the American Legion Hall were out on Lee Lake, about four hundred yards from Nappy's.

Today the creamery is out of business, the feed store is a motorcycle dealership, and the whore is gone, having been murdered on a Saturday night by a jealous farmer who had the bad luck to have actually fallen in love with her. Now as then, there are no movie theaters, no library, and no newspapers, except on Sundays when the Montpelier and Manchester and Boston papers can be purchased at Saltweidel's after early Mass at St. Cecilia's. The church had a school, which was where my sister and I were taught by the nuns that everything we'd ever need could be found in our own back yard.

My father broke my arm one day when I came to my sister's rescue. He'd been slapping her around the back yard for some sort of infraction I've forgotten now. I leaped on his back and knocked him down, and then when he got back up I wrapped my arms around his neck and ran him all doubled-up smack into the trunk of a big maple tree, head-first.

He slumped down at the base of the tree, dazed and cursing. Then he got up and, without looking at me or my sister and with patches of blood on his head glistening in the sun, walked down to Nappy's to drink.

I watched as he moved down the road and my chest heaved and I had trouble unclenching my fists. It was the first time anyone had fought back and it would be enough. There would be no more trouble from The Mister. My sister lay down in the cool grass near the maple and cried.

But it wasn't enough that I'd stilled my father's violence. I had to leave. As I watched him staggering off to Nappy's, I knew I'd end up the same way if I didn't do something about it right then and there. When he was out of sight, I got my sister and we took the family Dodge the back way out of town to the next county, where there was a hospital and a court of law. I had my arm taken care of, and then my sister and I went to the courthouse and swore out a criminal complaint against our father.

A judge put us up that night, even though he shouldn't have, and after that we lived with the sheriff and his family. The Mister hired a lawyer for the trial, but there wasn't much the lawyer could do.

The Mister told the judge that he'd never touched either my sister

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or me. My mother took the stand and told the judge, "The Mister always tells the plain truth." But she couldn't look the judge in the eye.

Then my sister and I took turns at the stand. We told about the day The Mister had slapped my sister around and broken my arm. We told about other days like that, days when it was even worse and days when he had even beat up on our mother. "No matter what you do, Your Honor," I said when I had the chance, "I swear that that old man has beaten up my sister and me for the last time. I swear." And I didn't cry, but the judge did.

Then the judge rapped down the gavel and declared my sister and me wards of the State. He also ordered my father to pay over a percentage of his wages toward our support, which he never did.

Anyway, the judge and his wife became our foster parents and we were raised well enough. My sister teaches American literature at a prep school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and I'm assistant district attorney in Brooklyn. The funeral trip was our first back to Island Notch since blowing town in the Dodge.

I couldn't sleep.

It was almost one in the morning. The Mister would be six feet under in seven hours and however many minutes it would take to fill in the hole that was waiting for him.

I dressed myself and quietly left the little house, heading down to Nappy's. The smell of wood smoke was in the air. I buttoned up my shirt all the way against the nip and closed my tweed jacket.

When I reached the tavern, Dooley was locking up. He didn't seem surprised to see me, though. "Like me ta open up special for ya?" he asked.

I almost told him not to bother and then I thought about all the hours I'd have to spend lying awake unless I got a few drinks in me. "Please," I said. And Dennis labored at the door and it swung open wide.

"Just a whiskey, Mr. Dooley," I said.

He poured out a Canadian Club and I tipped it back and drained it. He poured me another.

"Mr. Dooley, what did you think of my old man?"

Dennis poured himself a whiskey and sipped a few drops off the top. I believe it was the first time I ever saw him drink anything besides Nehi sodas. He pushed up his spectacles with a middle finger.

"Didn't much like him," Dooley said. "Lotsa others did, though,

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mainly on account of all his jokes, which were mainly on account of me."

"I remember—" I almost called him Dog Brains.

"Yeah, well, the thing about this town," Dooley said as he poured himself another whiskey, "and any other pissant town is that you can't throw anybody away right when you want."

Dooley finished half his second whiskey. I lit a cigarette and asked him what he meant exactly.

"Well, it's not like New York, y'know. Down in New York, you don't like somebody, I guess you can keep away. Here in this little burg you gotta see him ev'ry day whether you wanta or not."

"And you didn't especially want to see my father."

"Well, hell no!" Dooley exploded. His face went crimson and for just a moment I saw something like anger in his eyes. "How'd *you* like it, somebody callin' you 'Dog Brains' and all like that for years 'n makin' ev'rybody laugh at ya?"

I shook my head. "I wouldn't like it at all, Mr. Dooley."

" 'Course not!" Dooley tossed back his whiskey. This time I poured us a round. "Think ya could forget things like that?"

"No."

" 'Course not. 'Specially when he's blowin' off about it for ten, fifteen, twenty years, an' he still keeps heapin' it on."

We were quiet for several minutes.

"But like I said," Dooley resumed, "here in this kinda place, ya gotta live with what you hate same as what you like. Your old man was a guy I hadda live with—"

Dooley got very agitated again. He slammed his fist down on the bar and couldn't speak for a second or two until he got his troubled breathing back under control.

"—until I just couldn't no more."

I stared at him as something began clicking in my lawyer's mind.

Dooley hung his head and said, "You know what I mean, all right. Only difference between us is you ain't got dog brains like me. You got out clean."

I heard myself talking in my district attorney voice: "Mr. Dooley, the day my father came into your bar from the woods, he had a drink and a sandwich, is that right?"

"Yessir."

"You were washing dishes and didn't see him fall off his stool?"

"That's right. That part's like I told ya up to Gant's."

"Then what happened? What really happened?"

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"I turned around and he wasn't there," Dooley said. "So I took a look over the bar and he was down on the floor gaspin'. I couldn't understand anything he said. And then in walks his buddy, Slim, who says it sure looks to him like your old man's done gone and croaked, even though Henry's still breathin' and gaspin'. I get Slim to help me stand him up, but your old man's not too steady, so we lay him out on the pool table.".

Dooley stopped talking. He walked to the end of the bar, reached below the underledge for something in a cloth bag, and came back and plunked it down in front of me. I knew what it was.

"Go on," I said to him.

"Welp, Slim acts real funny like, sayin' over and over how your old man's dead and nothin' anybody can do about it now. Says he's dead sure as shootin'."

"Then what?"

Dooley pushed his spectacles back up the bridge of his nose again and said, "Then Slim goes off to get your mom. And he takes his sweet time about it.".

"And then?"

"We was all alone, your old man and me, just like I'm all alone with you now." Dooley patted the cloth bag. "And I remembered how he named me Dog Brains that day. Hell, you remember—you was there. Ya don't forget stuff like that. I had my chance, so I did it."

I could guess the rest. But I didn't know if I could handle it.

"Everybody knows about it?" I asked.

"Yeah," Dooley said. "Some like what I done, some don't. Just like people kinda liked your old man's jokes but didn't like what he done to you kids. Nobody's forgot that, y'know.

"So nobody said nothin'. Lyle Gant took care of the body by puttin' it in one of them boxes that covers up the gut and that was that."

We each took another whiskey and we drank slowly.

"What're ya goin' ta do about it?" Dennis asked me.

I smiled at him as I got up off the barstool and walked toward the door. "Just what I did before, Mr. Dooley. I'm going to get out of town and forget about it."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Inspector Ghote story by

H. R. F. KEATING

In his cover letter from England when submitting this story, H.R.F. Keating said: "Here's a piece I wrote for the Police Review *(limited circulation) over here. I've had the idea of an all-telephone story for years but always thought I might not be able to work it out." We think you'll agree that he worked it out beautifully. A deceptively simple story, and fully as entertaining as we have come to expect of Mr. Keating's Inspector Ghote tales . . .*

HELLO, HELLO, INSPECTOR GHOTE

by H. R. F. KEATING

"Hello, hello. Inspector Ghote?"

"Ghote speaking."

"Oh, hello, Inspectorji."

"Who is this? Who is there?"

"Oh, Inspectorji, it is I."

"I? I? Who in all Bombay is I?"

"Inspectorji, it is Budhoo only."

"Budhoo? Budhoo? Are you—are you the Budhoo I am sometimes meeting?"

"But, yes, Inspectorji, it is I, Budhoo."

"Why are you using telephone? Such is not at all what we were arranging for when you were having something to tell."

"No. No, Inspectorji, this is first time I have talked on telephone ever at all. But, Inspectorji, I have watched and watched Suleiman Dada when he was using, and now I have seen how to do it."

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"But you are not telephoning from Suleiman Dada's posh flat itself? Malabar Hill, Mount Pleasant Road?"

"Oh, Inspectorji, Suleiman Dada is shifting. Now he has flat at Nepean Sea Road. But it is from there I am talking. I am not at all knowing if other telephones are working just like Suleiman Dada's."

"But—but is the dada there? Are any of his goondas there also? How dare you call me by name openly in front of such a Number One anti-social?"

"Oh, Inspectorji, Inspectorji, I would not. Inspectorji, if I was doing same, Suleiman Dada would be slitting throat for me ear to ear. That you must be knowing."

"True enough, my friend. So why are you taking such a damn bloody risk?"

"Oh, Inspectorji, Suleiman Sahib is out of station altogether. I am by myself here. That is what I am wanting to tell, Inspector. Suleiman Dada has gone in great hurry-purry, and I am thinking that today is going to be Big Day—"

"Speak up, man, speak up. I cannot hear. Shut off that damn radio."

"No radio, Inspector."

"Do not shout, man. Do not shout. Now, speak clearly. Did you say the Big Day?"

"Yes, Inspector, Big Day."

"There has been a delivery?"

"Oh, yes, Inspectorji, big big delivery. To a godown at Indira Docks. Inspector, it is two thousand cartons of catfish itself. Frozen catfish."

"Catfish? But— Ah. It is that high-smelling stuff. So there are drugs placed inside for smuggling?"

"Ji haan, Inspectorji. What else?"

"And this is Big Day, you were saying? The Big Day I let you go free from that pocket-maar charge to learn all about?"

"Ji, sahib. I am hearing Suleiman Dada say Number One boss is wanting to check consignment himself. That fellow no one is at all knowing will be at the godown, Inspector."

"Yes, yes. But when, Budhoo? When? And just where in Indira Docks is this godown?"

"Inspectorji, it is—"

"Yes? Yes? Budhoo? Budhoo?"

"Budhoo?"

"Budhoo, you are there?"

"Inspector, I think I am hearing— Inspector, it is—"

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Click.

Tringg, tringg. Tringg, tringg.

"Hello, hello. Is that V.P. Road Police Station? Inspector Ghote here."

"Police station? Are you saying police station?"

"Yes, yes. That is V.P. Road Police Station?"

"No, no. This is New Gentleman Restaurant only."

Click.

Tringg, tringg. Tringg, tringg.

"Hello. V.P. Road Police Station?"

"V.P. Road Police Station."

"Is that V.P. Road P.S.? You are not at all sounding like a police station."

"I am hoping not. I am hoping not. This is the paan-shop on corner of Sukhlaji Street. Nice paans to munch, and nice nice girls we are having all 'round. But policewallas, oh, no."

"Clear the line, clear the line. This is hundred percent urgent."

Click.

Tringg, tringg. Tringg, tringg. Tringg, tringg. Tringg, tringg.

Click.

Tringg, tringg. Tringg, tringg.

"V.P. Road Police Station. Hello?"

"Inspector Ghote, Headquarters C.I.D. here. Give me the Station House Officer, ek dum, ek dum."

"Yes, Inspector. Right away, Inspector."

Click, click, click.

"Lock-up in charge."

"Lock-up in charge? What do you mean, lock-up in charge?"

"This is the lock-up. I am the in charge."

"But I am asking for Station House Officer. Get me put on to your S.H.O. Headquarters C.I.D. here. Jaldi, jaldi, jaldi."

Click, click, click.

"Station House Officer, V.P. Road P.S."

"Ah, thank God. Listen, this is Inspector Ghote, Headquarters C.I.D. Now, I have a kabari in among Suleiman Dada's gang—"

"Informer in there? First-class work, Inspector."

"Yes, yes, never to mind that. Thing is, this fellow was telephoning

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me from Suleiman Dada's residence itself. Damn fool that he is. And in middle of call he told me someone was coming and line was shut off. Now I am thinking it was the dada himself coming and my fellow is in danger of his life only. So, can you get four–five men 'round there double-quick?"

"Certainly, Inspector. It is a damn bad thing if it is getting known to one and all that a kabari has met a nasty fate. Where is it that he is?"

"But at Suleiman Dada's flat, Nepean Sea Road."

"And the flat is where, Inspector?"

"You do not know yourself? You are having top-notch gang leader inside your area and you are not knowing where he is residing?"

"But, Inspector, I am thinking he must have just only come to Nepean Sea Road. I was hearing he was staying on Malabar Hill, no?"

"He was, he was. But he has shifted."

"And now he is where? You are no more knowing?"

"No. My fellow was saying Nepean Sea Road only."

"But, Inspector, there are twenty–thirty big flats-blocks there. How can we find just one flat only when it is a matter of a damn hurry?"

"Yes, yes, it is hard I am thinking— No. No. Wait. I have one clue. While I was talking with my kabari I was—"

Click.

"Switchboard? Switchboard? I have been cut off."

"You are calling, caller?"

"Yes, yes. I have been cut off. Damn vital call. To V.P. Road P.S."

"You were not cut off by me, caller. Kindly dial once more."

Tringg, tringg. Tringg, tringg.

"Hello, hello, V.P. Road P.S.?"

"V.P. Road P.S. here."

"Station House Officer. I was cut off. Urgent, urgent matter."

Click, click, click.

"Hello. Lock-up in charge speaking."

"No, no, no. Get me back to S.H.O. Hurry, hurry, hurry."

Click, click, click.

"Station House Officer."

"Ah. It is Ghote again."

"Ah, yes, Inspector, we were cut off."

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"I know, I know. Now, listen. While my kabari was talking I was having much difficulty to hear because of some damn music."

"A radio, Inspector?"

"No, no. He was assuring there was no radio there. But I am thinking. Why would there be music at this time of day, very loud?"

"Don't know, Inspector."

"A wedding, man! A wedding! Tell your men to go hell-for-leather only to Nepean Sea Road and to look out for a wedding party—those lamp-carrying fellows outside, anything. Then ask at the nearby block of flats for one Suleiman Sahib, or even for a newcomer only. Then they are to break in and be asking questions after. Okay?"

"Tikh hai, Inspector. Tikh hai."

"Hello, hello, Inspector Ghote?"

"Ghote speaking."

"Hello, Inspectorji. It is I, Budhoo. All is okay-okay, Inspector. Suleiman Dada was beating up, but your policewallas came in nick of time. And they were arresting the bastard only."

"Arresting? Arresting? But how the hell is he going to go to his meeting with this Number One boss nobody knows if he is behind the bars? How am I to get my prize catch red-handed now? Budhoo, I am wishing one thing only."

"Yes, Inspectorji?"

"That Suleiman Dada had taken the cord of that telephone and wrapped it 'round and 'round your damn neck."

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It wasn't because Millie was younger, or prettier. It was her attitude . . .

THE SHOOT-2-KILL GUN CLUB

by JERRY FAVRETTO

It's not that I'm not a liberated woman or anything like that, but there are certain things it's just not natural for a woman to do. Now I'm all for equal pay for equal work and I never did believe a woman's place is alternating between the kitchen and bedroom, but even I draw the line somewhere. And watching Millie out there with the deer club was just too much.

It all started when she married Bill. It was Bill's second marriage and none of us thought she was right for him. It wasn't because she was younger than us, or prettier than us. It was her attitude. Of course, at first we did attribute that to her youth, but after a while we got so fed up with it we couldn't excuse it any longer.

What she did to me is typical. We've been a close group of couples for over ten years. The men have all been members of the Shoot-2-Kill Gun Club since high school, and as they married the wives became friends, too, drawn together by the loneliness caused by the consuming passion for the hunt that all our husbands shared. But then along came Millie.

After Bill's first wife left him, driven away because she needed more of Bill than Bill was willing to give, he met Millie in a singles bar. At the next gathering we had—as usual, a barbecue in someone's back yard—he introduced Millie. Right away we knew there'd be trouble. The men always sat together discussing bait piles, hard-nosed game wardens, and the current prices of hunting licenses, and swapping oft-told stories about the "rack" that got away, while the wives sat together discussing anything and everything else. After being introduced, Millie, after smiling what could only be construed as a condescending smirk, went and sat with the men, dressed to kill in clothes none of us would wear to a barbecue even if we could afford them.

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We tried. Especially me. I tried hard to include her in our group, to make her one of us. But she wasn't having any. It really bothered us to watch her sitting ten feet away with every one of our husbands taking turns fawning over her, actually *talking* to her. There she'd sit, batting her false lashes at them, pretending to be interested in those god-old stories we'd all heard for years. But the men bought her act.

That would've been bad enough, but when the comparisons started, I'd had it. Why can't you be more like Millie? my husband would say. It was amazing. For years he'd been building this separate life for himself and his buddies. I know for a fact I'd have been looked at as an intruder if I'd ever tried to join him.

Then there were the phone calls. Whenever one of the other husbands would want to talk to mine, they'd call and ask for him. If they had their wives call for them, we'd chat a minute, they'd give me the message, and that would be that. But not with Bill and Millie. With them, Millie always did the calling. When I'd answer the phone, she'd ask for my husband. She never talked to me. It was like she was one of the boys. It was bad enough to be treated like that by the men, but when she started it it was enough to drive you crazy.

We didn't believe it when hunting season came and Millie signed up for shooting classes, given by a local cop at the high school. We really didn't believe it as we watched her prepare for muzzle-loading season. We didn't think she would go. But she sure was planning to.

As the time drew near, the get-togethers started to consist of intensified hunting plans, which of course included Millie. The club was planning a weekend up north where the big racks were. It was noplace for a woman, there among our husbands, actually trying to decide which of her designer sweaters to pack.

But for me the worst was just beginning. Almost daily now, my husband started talking about Millie and what a woman she was. How she, at least, shared Bill's love for the great outdoors. How I couldn't hold a candle to her. Maybe it was my age, he started to speculate. Maybe younger women knew better how to please their husbands.

I started to read. I started with his muzzle-loader manual. I read that baby inside out and pretty soon I knew all there was to know about the gun.

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Next, I invited Millie to lunch. Bring your gun, I told her, the new one. Maybe you can teach me something. You're so smart about those things.

Well, she came, and she brought her new muzzle loader with her. I oohed and ahed over it like I've been doing for years with my husband. I convinced her I was interested in the thing. I convinced her to leave it with me so I could show the beauty to my husband that night.

It was a busy afternoon for me. First I took the barrel out of the stock. Then I drilled a 5/16" hole in the metal-locking mechanism. Searching through my husband's workshop, I found the screws I wanted. The screws had to be shorter but with the same size head. I then removed the existing screws in the metal plate that runs through the wooden stock next to the hammer and replaced them with the shorter screws. Running an oiled rag over the whole thing, I carefully eased it up and squinted down the sights, resting the weapon against my cheek. It was ready.

Next weekend was the hunting trip. I had plenty of time to reconsider. And I almost did. Then my husband asked me why I didn't wear my hair like Millie's, it was so cute.

The rest I heard second-hand. But it's one hunting story I'll never tire of. In fact, it's one hunting story that gets repeated often at both ends of the barbecue.

Apparently, Millie got a shot. An eight-pointer wandered through the brush to where she stood. Millie was dressed, I understand, in the cutest hunting outfit ever seen.

She had already poured the black powder into the gun from the engraved metal flask all the guys had chipped in for, set the bullet in the barrel, tamped it down, and rammed it in. She had already fit the percussion cap on and locked the hammer back.

As the story goes, she slowly raised her gun and sighted down at the deer, who was standing only ten yards away. When she pulled the trigger, the hammer struck the percussion cap which ignited the black powder, but something went wrong.

Apparently, the gun was defective. The guys have already sworn off that particular company. When she fired, somehow the stock splintered and the tailpiece, the piece that was held on by screws, dismantled on impact. I won't go into detail.

But you know, damn it all, she still got the deer.

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Eden specialized in patients who didn't have close relatives. The literature given to those interested in the nursing home was frank about it. "We want people who need us. We want to be your family . . ."

THE HOME

by JOE L. HENSLEY

Shelby's second heart attack came during a trial in which he was defending a man named Blandon on a jewel burglary. He remembered the crushing pain, falling, then blackness.

When he was allowed to leave the hospital, it was only upon his promise to move to a nursing home.

Shelby sold his condo and appointed his bank to handle his affairs.

He then prepared to die. He found that it took very little effort and was, except for recurring dark-of-the-night sweats when he was sure he'd not live to see morning again, boring.

He was sixty-seven and he still seemed healthy enough after he'd recovered from the attack. There was angina pain and shortness of breath, but that was it as far as overt symptoms went. His doctor explained to him that his heart was *insufficient* and that he needed a place where he could have constant medical attention available. So, a nursing home.

At times, thinking about his bad heart made Shelby smile. There were lawyers, particularly criminal prosecutors, who'd have sworn on a pile of religious tracts that he was heartless, lawyers he'd crushed by cleverness in closing argument or by vicious cross-examination of unsure prosecution witnesses. He'd mostly defended persons accused of murder, but he'd taken other criminal cases when there were no murder cases to be tried. He'd been an advocate's advocate. He'd taken only cases where he believed the accused innocent, losing some, winning a lot.

He'd been the best, but now there'd be no more trials. His heart condition made it impossible. The tension of a trial, the open warfare wherein a client might lose his freedom or life, had been what he

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lived for. Without the courtroom he felt useless. *And old—finally old.*

The nursing home was named Eden. It sat on a hill in the middle of wooded acreage ten miles distant from the city where Shelby had practiced. It had been a private estate, but when it had been sold for a nursing home the mansion had been modernized. There was a high, barbed fence around the property and an armed guard at the closed gate. *Safe.*

There was a separate building near the gate for visitors, but visitors seldom came. Eden specialized in patients who didn't have close relatives. The literature given to those interested in the home was frank about it. "We want people who need us. We want to be your family."

Shelby had selected the place after reading various competing tracts and then had been interviewed by Mr. Hoskins from the home before being "accepted."

"Ours is a quiet place," Mr. Hoskins had warned. "We control all visitation. We also don't permit our patients to travel outside the nursing home. We have our own in-house medical staff and we would expect your doctor to turn your complete medical file over to our people. Our staff is the best in the field of geriatric medicine. Would anything I've said be a problem? If so, we can stop now."

"I doubt it," Shelby said. His own doctor didn't like him. The doctor's house had been burglarized once and he'd told Shelby tartly he had no use for lawyers who protected criminals.

Mr. Hoskins looked approvingly at Shelby's written application. "I see you list no family. Understand again that we limit visitation to once every other week with relatives. All visitation is carried out in an area adjacent to the home under strict supervision. We can't have visitors upsetting our patients."

Shelby shook his head. "I've two cousins, but I've not heard from either of them in years. I never married. Never found the time. There'd be no visitors."

"You were a lawyer. Were you with a large firm?"

"Single practitioner," Shelby said. "I was ordered to shut my office down after my last attack."

"You seem to have the necessary finances to pay us," Hoskins continued, his tone favorable.

"Yes," Shelby said. "I can pay you. Your place isn't as expensive as many. Yet, except for your visitation rules, it seems the best. How do you manage that?"

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"We're privately endowed. Certain of our patients have left us their estates or a part of their estates as a reward for the care we gave them in their declining years. That's why we're careful about admissions." Mr. Hoskins smiled a little. "During your stay with us, if you find our facilities satisfactory, we would expect you to consider a gift to the home upon your eventual demise."

"Is that required?" Shelby asked, not liking that part.

"Certainly not," Hoskins answered reprovingly. "But you should remember that your care is being partially paid for by those who resided at the home before you. We ask only that you consider such a bequest once you've experienced the care we provide."

It sounded reasonable. Shelby examined Hoskins. The nursing-home administrator seemed above reproach. His clothes were expensive and neat, he was fiftyish, and he wore hornrims. All his movements were precise. A jury would believe him. He vaguely reminded Shelby of a child molester he had defended (and lost) years back. Very proper.

They shook hands and it was settled. Shelby signed a penalty-clause contract.

Mr. Hoskins smiled as he was leaving. "We'll see you soon," he said. "Have a good day."

And so Shelby moved to Eden.

The first patient he met was a one-time client. His name was Julian Kay and Shelby had defended him twenty years back when Kay's wife had died under suspicious but ultimately unprovable (at least as far as Kay was concerned) circumstances. Arsenic poisoning. The State's difficulties had been in showing that Kay had administered the poison to his wife when tests ordered by Shelby showed Kay himself had traces of arsenic in his own body. Shelby knew that those who used arsenic as a poison often managed to accidentally ingest some of it themselves. He suspected Kay's wife had tried to poison Kay and botched it. That was his winning trial tactic.

Kay had the next room. He sat upright in bed. "How are you?" Shelby asked solicitously when Hoskins introduced them.

Kay ignored the question. He watched Shelby. "Devil," he said. "Devil!" He shook with agitation.

Hoskins drew Shelby away. "He makes no sense some days. He's had a series of small strokes. He's been here for a long time."

"How long?"

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Hoskins made a vague gesture. "A long time. Years. Why do you ask?"

Shelby shrugged. He'd lost track of Kay soon after the trial. The man had been peculiar. But he'd sworn his innocence and Shelby had believed him.

At times thereafter Shelby would nod in at Kay from the door without receiving a response. Kay's color was bad and he was about fifty pounds lighter than Shelby remembered him. Shelby heard one of the pretty nurses say Kay was "on his death bed." Sometimes Shelby could hear him groaning at night. He also heard doctors in the room working on Kay and saw attendants pushing complicated life-support machines into his room. But Kay lived on.

There were things Shelby didn't agree with in the home's routine. The food was good enough, but it wasn't a coronary diet. It was high-fat food—meat and gravy, and rich desserts at noon and at night. For breakfast it was eggs with bacon or sausage, heavily buttered toast, pancakes, and sweet rolls, served leisurely and late. It was the kind of food Shelby had wanted, but not allowed himself to eat outside, after the first attack. (Meals were served on china with heavy silverware, a budding rose in a vase on the bedtray, by a smiling attendant—female and pretty for the male patients, handsome and muscular for the female patients.)

The doctor assigned to Shelby, Doctor Cart, seemed vaguely familiar to him. Shelby asked him about the diet and he spoke of "good" triglycerides and cholesterol and "bad" ones, and of a secret Eden food-treatment formula. He took Shelby's pulse and listened intently to the faulty heart. "You're doing well," he said. He then marked a special diet for him on his card, which he told Shelby was optional if a patient worried about his diet and requested another.

"We're all born with ailing hearts," he joked. "It stops, we stop. Sleep. Watch TV. See what a fine set you have? Trust us. Relax."

Shelby nodded, thinking the humor unfunny, at least to a man with a heart as "insufficient" as his.

Thereafter, sometimes the special diet came, sometimes it didn't. When it did come, it was unappetizing, as if the fine Eden cooks had thrown it on the plate in disgust. He didn't complain again about the food, and gradually the regular diet returned to full-time status.

Shelby did feel well, but he'd felt that way before both heart attacks. He slept nine or ten hours a night. He tried to keep from gaining weight by eating sparsely. He looked in vain for any sort

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of exercise facility to burn up calories and keep his aging muscles fit.

"Don't you have exercise facilities here?" he asked the doctor.

Doctor Cart sniffed. "No. We decided against an exercise area. We believe that our patients benefit more from rest than exercise. You're not a boy any more, Mr. Shelby. You'll live longer doing things our way."

"But surely some mild exercise should be beneficial?"

"I'm not in total disagreement," Doctor Cart conceded. "You're a bit younger than our usual patient. I'll allow you to improvise."

Shelby improvised and walked. If there was angina pain or shortness of breath he stopped for a while, then walked some more.

He observed that a high percentage of the patients at Eden ran from mildly fat to clearly obese. When he commented on it, Doctor Cart frowned. "You were a lawyer outside, Mr. Shelby, not a doctor. Leave the practice of medicine to us. Fat isn't automatically fatal."

There was a decent library, which kept Shelby from becoming a TV addict like so many of the other patients.

When fall became winter, more of the walks he took were confined to inside the mansion. He was allowed to roam everywhere except the staff areas. The staff door was kept locked, but now and then when the door was open he caught a glimpse of rich draperies, lush furniture, and a hanging chandelier. Shelby guessed those rooms had been the central part of the original mansion. Some nights he heard sounds of revelry from within. Early in the morning he could hear the staff breakfasting together before the patients were served.

The kitchen, the surgery, and intensive-care rooms were also in that area and out of bounds. Once, during an evening walk, he examined the lock on the staff door. It was a simple one. Blandon, the accused burglar and jewel thief Shelby had last represented, had taught him about locks, after convincing Shelby he was innocent "this time." Shelby thought he could open the staff lock given the time plus some tools in his manicure set and wallet.

The home was becoming an easy life. Late breakfast, noon lunch, early dinner. Read, sleep, and walk. Outside, snow fell. Christmas and New Year's came. The staff held a sedate party for the patients and a wild one for themselves behind the staff door.

Shelby counted staff—doctors, nurses, attendants, maintenance people. There were a great many. None seemed to work very hard. Several times Shelby could have sworn he smelled Scotch on Cart's

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breath. And the night attendant in Shelby's area seemed to sleep better than Shelby.

Eden had a sixty-patient capacity. Multiplying what he paid for his own care times sixty did not add to a figure Shelby found impressive as revenue. The remainder must come from endowments.

The home was extremely quiet. Shelby saw the doctors, nurses, and attendants doling out pills for nerves, for sleep, for everything—pills and smiles—and decided it was quiet because so many of the old people were heavily doped. It was a great place to eat and sleep and die.

But what if you weren't ready to die?

One night, out of bordeom, he tested his burglar-client's instructions and picked open the lock of one of the medicine chests, using a sharp cuticle pick from his manicure set. He managed it silently and easily in the darkness while the night attendant snored. The chest was stocked with tranquilizers and sedatives. A locked compartment inside yielded to further probing. There were things he didn't recognize. Some of the bottles were marked with skull and crossbones. Others were strong sedatives or narcotics. Bottles of both types had been opened. Shelby didn't think that unusual. He knew doctors used all sorts of medicines and that some poisons did not kill if given in careful doses. He closed the chest back up.

He'd always been a light sleeper, but now he found himself sleeping well and long. Maybe there was something in the cocoa. It was oversweet, full of whipped cream, and had a slightly metallic aftertaste. At first he drank it, but later he poured it into a large flower pot beside his bed. Then he would prowl Eden's dark halls until dawn. He was restless and, for the first time in his life, lonely.

Hoskins, the administrator, talked with him in his office one day. By that time Shelby had made a few acquaintances. There was a fat old man he played chess with. The man had suffered a stroke and lost most of his ability to speak and all movement on his right side, but he could still use his left hand to move chessmen. He was an expert player. They kept the old man, whose name was Detmen, heavily tranquilized, but Detmen seemed resistant to the medicine and could function around it. Most of the people in the home were lumps. Detmen was refreshing.

His movements with the left hand were quick and snakelike. "Gotchee," he'd say. "Checkmay." Then he'd grin lopsidedly. A fine old man who'd been an architect.

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Detmen didn't like Doctor Cart. "Dite duck," he'd mutter darkly when Cart was near. Shelby finally figured that he was trying to say, "Diet doc."

There were three elderly ladies who invited Shelby to play bridge. They painted their lips and flirted with him outrageously, tittering at each other behind their cards. He was gallant with them and tried not to trump their aces. Then one of them, Laura Shannon, died one night and that ended the bridge sessions. The two survivors seemed not to know each other afterward. Shelby thought they might be getting added doses of tranquilizer from their doctors. Or maybe Laura Shannon had been the glue that held the bridge games together.

He asked Doctor Cart about it. "What did Laura Shannon die of?"

Cart pursed his lips. "She had many problems. High blood-pressure, a bad heart, and diabetes. She was over eighty. People don't live forever, Mr. Shelby."

"She was the most active of all the bridge players," Shelby said. "She seemed perfectly all right to me."

"Maybe hyperactivity helped speed her death," Doctor Cart answered reasonably. "That's something you might think about, Mr. Shelby. Are you walking too much? Are you too busy? Our attendants say you wander around a great deal, even at night."

"I'm restless," Shelby explained. "I need the exercise."

Detmen died as Shelby started his fifth month in the home. It was during an in-home operation Cart told Shelby had been intended to open up the large artery running from the heart to the brain. Detmen had said nothing to Shelby about any operation.

No more chess or bridge. Just walking.

Sometimes he caught the attendants watching him as he prowled the darkened halls. Sometimes he thought they used care in what they said to him and how.

I'm paranoid, he thought.

With the two people he'd liked most at Eden dead, Shelby tried to watch the soaps during the day, but couldn't stand them. Instead, he watched the snow beyond his window and dreamed of green grass and outdoor walks.

Hoskins smiled, interrupting Shelby's walk, and led him to his office.

"Are you enjoying your life here, Mr. Shelby?"

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"It's adequate," Shelby said.

"No more than that?" Hoskins asked, pouting a little.

Shelby relented. "It's nice." He tried a bit of sarcasm. "Very quiet. It's hard to become acquainted with people. They die."

Hoskins nodded piously. "Death is only a part of life. We must all face it sooner or later. This is a home for old, sick people. We keep them alive and happy as long as we can."

"Yes." Shelby had been thinking a great deal about Detmen. "But Mr. Detmen might have lived if he hadn't been operated on."

Hoskins shrugged. "He wanted to be better, to be well again. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be. He died on the operating table. It was a shame." He leaned forward. "May I talk with you on something of importance?"

Shelby nodded assent.

"We've had our lawyers prepare our form will plus a codicil to an already existing will showing bequests to Eden. The bequest figure in the forms is what we recommend to someone in your financial bracket without close relatives. Of course, you can devise any figure you want, less or more. We'd like you to examine the forms."

Shelby said all right.

Hoskins handed him a sheaf of papers and shook his hand moistly. "May I call on you in a week or so?"

"You said there was no obligation?"

"Absolutely." Mr. Hoskins smiled. He reminded Shelby of a minister he'd defended for the murder of his sister, a man who swore on a Bible he had not done the murder. Shelby had dressed him all in black and had him carry and read his Bible in court while the trial proceeded. The jury had come back in an hour with a verdict of "not guilty."

Shelby took the will back to his room, examined it, and shoved it in a drawer. His own will was made. His money was to be shared by a youth club he admired and his university. He saw no reason to change it.

He told Hoskins his decision a week later. The man inclined his head. "Perhaps you'll change your mind as time passes," he said. "Some do. I hope you'll continue to consider it."

Shelby found himself watching what went on around him more closely. Having made it known that he would leave the home no money in his will, he wondered what would happen.

The food and service remained good. But he realized that someone

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shadowed him those nights he walked the darkened halls. And it seemed even harder to stay awake now than before he had started to dump the hot chocolate.

No one came to visit, but although Shelby expected no one a fragile hope remained. He had a few legal friends outside. One might come. His secretary of many years had moved to Florida when the office closed. He asked about calling out to his bank and was refused. When he insisted, Doctor Cart came to see him.

"We don't let you do that," he said. "You're here because you ruined your health with worry and work. Now we take care of all that for you. Every month we send an itemized bill to your bank, along with a statement of your physical condition." He shook his head and again Shelby caught a faint odor of Scotch. "Relax. Use the home. Enjoy us."

"I only want to talk to the trust officer to see how things are going," Shelby said. "Is this a nursing home or a prison?"

"It's a nursing home, with our own highly successful methods. We insist that our rules be followed. Reread your contract with us, Mr. Shelby." Doctor Cart stood for a moment, lost in thought. "*Write* your bank. That should be good therapy for you."

"Speaking of therapy, aren't there any trips outside?" Shelby asked. "I've got cabin fever." He couldn't admit he was lonely.

Cart shook his head. "We used to do trips, but we stopped. They were very traumatic for the patients. One man died on the bus and we had sheriffs and investigators all over us for days. It was very upsetting for us and the patients."

Shelby studied him. He remembered what Detmen had said. "Dite duck." And he remembered something else, something he'd read long ago in the newspapers about a doctor who'd specialized in quick-weight-loss diets, who'd given speed pills by the bucketful to his patients. Shelby remembered the scandal and the trial, but only vaguely. Had Cart's license been revoked?

"Before he died, Mr. Detmen said that you used to specialize in diet therapy, Doctor Cart. Is that true?"

Cart smiled coldly. "I came into the field of geriatrics some years ago when I decided to change my specialty." He examined Shelby with clinical eyes. "I'm reputed to be quite good in my new area of interest."

"I see," Shelby said. "But did you specialize in diets at one time?"

The doctor looked back at him without answering.

"I only asked," Shelby said softly . . .

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For the first time Shelby had second thoughts about Eden. His fear of death had abated and what came to him in his first moments of suspicion was not renewed fear but anger. Could this place be some kind of trap for old people without close family or friends? Did they cage the unwary, get them to change their wills, then kill them with poor care or a pill? Or on an operating table, like tough old Detmen?

Thinking about it at length made the idea seem preposterous, but he continued to think about it anyway. Eden would be a perfect place to pull off such a scheme. What few visitors came would have little interest in the patients' concerns. Shelby knew better than most that the world was imperfect. He knew a hundred confidence schemes and how they were run.

He considered his situation. It would be profitless for them to kill him unless he changed his will in their favor. Then one day he saw Hoskins enter Kay's room and shut the door. Hearing him leave a short while later, he decided he would pay a visit to Kay himself that night.

He waited until late, until the night attendant had gone for coffee, and then entered the room next door. Kay's old eyes followed him from door to bed. Lost eyes.

"Do you remember me?" Shelby asked.

Nothing.

"I defended you once in court."

After a moment there was a tiny look of recognition. Kay nodded. "You defended me, devil."

When Kay said no more, Shelby opened the bedside table drawer. It was empty except for a sheaf of papers like those Shelby had received from Hoskins, legal papers concerning new wills and codicils to old ones. "Did you sign those papers for the home?"

"Today," Kay whispered. "I wanted it done." He turned his face away from Shelby and pulled the pillow closer to his head. "I killed her all those years ago," he said softly to the wall. "But the jury said I didn't kill her. You did that, devil."

"And now the staff here is going to let you die, is that it?" Shelby asked. "To reward you? Because you want that?"

Kay watched the wall without answering.

From far away there was a sound. Shelby left the room.

He was now fairly sure Eden was a murder trap, but there still seemed to be a reasonable doubt. He'd lived by reasonable doubt.

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Even if they let Kay die, that didn't make it certain they were killing others.

But there was enough evidence for Shelby to want out. There were other nursing homes. He sat on his bed and tried to figure a way of escaping Eden. He couldn't climb the fence or get out the guarded gate. Maybe he could hide in the back seat of a doctor's car. But he remembered seeing the guards looking in the back seats of departing cars. It had puzzled him until now. Then he had a thought. What about the letter Cart had suggested?

Shelby wrote a long, devious letter to his bank and delivered it to Doctor Cart. The letter asked that the bank send someone to the nursing home to see Shelby. He made the letter insistent and specified that they send a lawyer he'd known, making the lawyer seem to be a bank employee.

That was the day Kay died.

No one came to visit Shelby on the week that followed, or the one following that. One morning into the third week, while Shelby was preparing a new, more strident letter, something went wrong. Nausea and blackness. Doctor Cart was summoned quickly and Shelby's bed was pushed down the hall, through the staff door, and into an intensive-care room. Shelby felt no pain, only a loss of seeing and being. He was hooked to monitoring devices. Doctor Cart gave him several injections and took his pulse and blood pressure. A nurse stood watch.

Inside Shelby's brain, when he could get around the drugs, he discovered anger.

If he lived—

He thought he might live. He could perceive them working feverishly, presumably toward that purpose.

He wandered away from consciousness.

Waking was difficult. It was hard to open his eyes, so he kept them closed.

There was no pain in his chest and his heartbeat seemed to be regular.

He could hear bits of conversation. He thought one voice was Doctor Cart's, soft but authoritative. He seemed to be in another room. "He does enough sedatives, that doesn't solve our problems."

"Codicil—" That was Mr. Hoskins' unctuous voice.

"He won't do—" Yes, it was definitely Dr. Cart, but his words were difficult to make out.

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"Who would hear? We can always give shock treatments if we have to."

"True. Perhaps we'll try. He'll be grateful we saved his life. But he's been a problem—always nosing around."

"He has money," Hoskins said firmly. "You know our kind of patient isn't easy to find."

Shelby's sick heart pounded alarmingly. There was no longer a reasonable doubt.

When he finally opened his eyes, a pretty nurse smiled at him with foxlike eyes. He remembered how to influence jurors and he smiled back.

"I'm alive," he said, as if amazed about it. "You've saved my life." His voice sounded shockingly weak.

The nurse smiled down at him and he reminded himself all of them were in on it. It couldn't work any other way. A whole staff of murderers. Forced bequests and sudden death for the contented, TV-addicted ancients, the good life for the staff.

Back in his room, he tried to get up, but his legs were gone. He was afraid of the food, but he ate it stoically. If it was drugged, there was no indication. He talked the nurse into bringing him a portable wheelchair.

He smiled at Cart and Hoskins and the rest of the staff. He was effusively grateful to them. He asked Hoskins for a new codicil form to study. He tried to appear weaker than he was and the eyes that had carefully watched him temporarily relaxed. He'd bought a little time.

When Hoskins visited again (with the codicil form), Shelby said: "I'll fill in a figure for you very soon. Give me a few days."

Two nights later he returned to the drug chest when the attendant was asleep. He opened both locks. A long life of cross-examining pathologists and lab technicians had made him aware of the power of some of the numbing and deadly things. Those with skull and crossbones in the chest he took on trust. Good enough for them, good enough for him.

A night attendant seeking clean linen almost caught him as he wheeled on toward the staff area, but he made it safely to the door and picked the lock with the manicure tool and a plastic credit card slipped down to hold open the lock. He rolled his chair inside and found the kitchen area.

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He dumped only light sedatives into the steaming coffee urn, trusting it would make the early coffee drinkers sleepy as they awaited the main course. He then used the poisons, tasting or smelling each additive gingerly and discarding any that were too bitter or too pungent. The pills he ground to a fine powder. Moving around slowly and with great care, he found a huge bowl of beaten eggs in the refrigerator and added a combination of the poisons. He put some of the poison in the freshly squeezed orange juice and more in the milk. There was a dispenser for mineral water at the end of a service table. There he was moderate, careful not to alter the color.

The staff would breakfast and then they would serve the late-rising patients. *If they could.*

A doctor might detect the poisons, but Shelby wondered if detection would be enough to save them all. Or many of them. He hoped not.

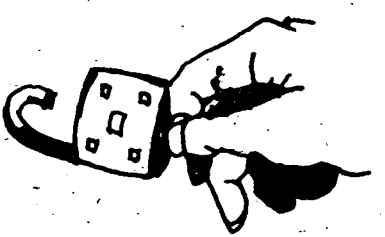
There would be sheriffs and State Police, sirens and flashing lights. *Lovely.* Perhaps he'd be accused. Maybe he could conduct his own case. Cinch self-defense.

He rolled unseen back to his bed and napped for a time. Something in the drugs he'd tasted made his heart fibrillate wildly for a time, but it passed. He felt weak, but well enough when he got up a few hours later. When Mr. Hoskins came in the outside door, just before the staff breakfast hour, Shelby was there to meet him. He reached into a pocket of the chair cover and offered over the codicil.

"This is what I want," Shelby told the administrator. "If you'll bring two witnesses along sometime today I'll sign it." He started to turn away, then stopped. "Any time after breakfast, but before *General Hospital.*"

Mr. Hoskins beamed when he read the figure Shelby had inserted.

"Have a good day," Shelby told him, moving off in the direction of his room.



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Steven LaPlante, EQMM "first story" author #630, is a native Oregonian, born and raised in Astoria, "on the mouth of the mighty Columbia River." After a stint with the Navy in Southeast Asia (during which time he read virtually every Ellery Queen novel in print), he returned and married, literally, the girl next door. They have two children, Andy and Laura. Mr. LaPlante works as a field investigator for a small federal agency. He started writing stories last year after entering the International Imitation Hemingway Contest on a lark and being chosen as a finalist. As we go to press he is 32 chapters into a 34-chapter murder mystery.

In the process of preparing "Business Sense" for the printer, a number of alternative titles for the story other than the author's perfectly serviceable one occurred to us—and we had the idea of offering six free copies of Ellery Queen's Prime Crimes 3, *the third in our series of annual anthologies of stories never before published in the United States, to readers who send in suggestions for two alternate titles the editors judge to be the most imaginative, original, and central to the plot and tone of the story (without giving away the ending!).*

The rules are simply that we will consider only entries with two *title suggestions (not one, and not three or more) and in the case of duplications, the entry with the earliest postmark will win. The deadline is October 15th and the winners will be announced in the March 1986 issue. Send entries to EQMM Title Contest, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017. We're sorry we won't be able to return any entries or to acknowledge receipt of any but those of the winners, but believe us, we will love your joining the fun . . .*

"Q"

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BUSINESS SENSE

by STEVEN LaPLANTE

Y'know, I didn't decide to kill Vance until he started gettin' sly about the money. Shoot, I was only into him for a little over fifteen thousand. He knew I was good for it. Hell, I got my own hardware store. I'm respected in this town—it's only three hundred and fifty souls, but they all know me, call me *Mister* Patten most of the time. I grew up here, got family here.

Yeah, Vance, he shoulda thought about that before he started pushin'. But now that I think on it, he had it figured that way all along—come slinkin' into Six Corners, sink his hooks into the hayseed real deep, then take over the store. My store! Well, you did a damn good job of it, Vance, you and them horses. And them dogs. Damn scrawny greyhound dogs!

Why'd I start on them? I'll tell you why. Vance. Vance explained all about odds and points and spreads and the like. Real helpful. Always ready with them papers and sheets of his!

So after a few months of that, with me not winning a whole lot of cash at it, what happens? Why, Vance, he walks into Patten's Hardware—I mean actually *comes right into the store during business hours*—and starts pickin' over the inventory with a real proprietary look in his eye. Lucky the place was empty at the time and no one seen him. 'Course he planned that, too, I'll bet.

"Why, hello, Jackie," he says to me in that pigeon-huntin' voice of his. "Just dropped by to see about our little 'problem.'"

See, that's what he called it when I went over fifteen thousand: our little problem. Thought he was bein' cute about it, him and his wingtip shoes. Had a hell of a time puttin' him off for one more week, even promised him *interest* and everything! Then I spent the whole week thinkin' on it. But wouldn't you know it? Pop! Up come the answer, just like makin' toast! Yep, it was Jack Patten's Perfect Solution.

It come to me to do a little varmint huntin'.

I'll explain. Patten's Hardware was the pride and joy of my daddy's life, and when he passed on I got the whole kit and kaboodle. We're too far from the city to make any big money, but it's a good living. I like to jaw with the customers, give the folks a little discount,

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maybe encourage the trade—that's the way it works, right? Business sense, you know? Y'gotta have it to stay afloat nowadays—and, well, I got it. Always had it, always will.

So the wheels start turnin' and I get to thinkin', Now just who knows Vance and me got a "business arrangement"? Nobody here in Six Corners, that's for sure. (Always saw him nighttimes or when I went up to the city for the weekend, do a little drinking, chase a—uh—place a few bets.) And what about up there? Anybody seen us together? Nope. Vance works alone, always alone. Told me so himself: "Jackie baby, I'm like you—in business for myself. I just use someone else's capital, mmm? That's right. No middle men—they'll squeeze you dry."

That's the way he'd talk, silky smooth and kinda spooky. Well, I had to agree about the middle-man bit, 'cause if I woulda placed all those bets myself instead of through Vance maybe it would of turned out different.

So who's gonna miss him? Who's gonna care? That's what really turned it for me. I knew I could get away with it. I knew! Then no fifteen thousand hard-earned bucks into Vance's slimy pockets!

The way it came to me was almost like an inspiration. See, I try to sell a little bit of everything down here. Tools, dry goods, electrical, plumbing. And sporting goods. Yeah, fishin' gear, huntin' stuff—shotguns, rifles.

Huntin' rifles.

So when my mind's made up, I go back to the stockroom and take one of the new .308s out of the box real careful. Now, I don't cut the paper seals. Instead I make one little slice in the end—them cartons are just cardboard—and that .308 slides right out, no fuss.

Then I load up.

Vance is waiting for me up there, just outside the city limits. Right off the freeway there's this nice little park with benches and a drinking fountain with a concrete bird.

"Jackie baby, good to see you!" he says, expecting I've got his blood money. But ol' Vance is wrong for once—he just don't know it yet. He heads over for the benches with a bottle and I hang back a little. It's getting dark and not a soul around. I ease the .308 out from the back seat, take a nice bead, and pow! Good to see *you*, Vance baby.

So I quick get back to Six Corners. It's 10:30 and the town's already rolled up for the night. I pull right up in front of the store, but not to worry—hell, everybody knows I'm married to the place. I get inside and set to work. First I clean up that .308 real good. Then I

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load it up with packing grease, put the paper wraps back on, and slide it back in the end of the factory box. One little strip of brown tape on the cut and we're home free.

It's simple, hey? The way I've got it figured is that even if the cops happen to get down this far and check on my recent sales, they sure as hell can't check on one that ain't been sold yet. Clever, right? Well, it's that business sense a' mine. And just what I figured on happens. First I read in the paper two or three days later about poor ol' Vance being found—and sure enough, they even got the caliber right. Know what? Turns out Vance, he's what you call a shady character. Got a record and all. Then a man drops in not more'n a week later to check the records. Just routine, he says—hittin' all the stores they can think of on the off chance. Hey, I'm only too glad to be of assistance! 'Course there's not a number outta place—I keep good books. And guess what? He doesn't even ask about the new inventory.

So here's Jack Patten, layin' way back in those famous weeds. I wait a coupla months, and when the leaves are finally turnin' brown I figure time's about right. I know that .308 can't just sit there in the store forever, I gotta operate like I always have. But here's where Jack Patten really does his homework. Yep, that's me again, always thinkin'.

Elmer Iverson? Yeah, Old Mother Elmer we call him around here. Well, me and the boys are planted around the potbelly, passin' on the plight of the world one noon, when Old Mother Elmer walks in and announces he's got it in his mind to get himself a mulie this fall. Now, Old Mother Elmer has gotta be the perfect customer for the .308. Elmer, he'll go huntin' once in his life and that gun'll gather dust for the next fifty years—which is fine by me, don't you know?

So I sell Elmer the .308. Give him a good deal, too. I made no more'n fifty profit on it—not countin' the other fifteen thousand, if you get my drift.

Well, there it is. That's the way it happened. I leaned back and set my mind to runnin' the store. It was the straight and narrow for me, boys, this time for good. No more horses and, for sure, no more dogs. Hell, I wouldn't even watch *Benji* on the tube any more.

I guess I should have mentioned that we call him Old Mother Elmer 'cause of *Mrs.* Elmer. Y'see, Elmer's been married to the same woman for fifty-four years, and each and every one of them years sweated right outta him. He does the cooking, the wash, everything.

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A real short rope she keeps him on, no wonder he's so thin. That's what told me the .308 had found a nice quiet place to rest. Elmer a hunter? Not too damn likely. No time for it.

But you already guessed it, didn't you? Yeah, Old Mother Elmer surprised us all, he did. I shoulda seen it coming, but I had my own pot bubblin' at the time. Yeah, Elmer, he wanted to go huntin' in the worst way. But not for mulies. No, Elmer was going after Big Game.

Mrs. Elmer.

Well, it's cold soup now. 'Course, after the deed Elmer walks right over to Ed and the boys at the station, that .308 still hangin' over his elbow like he's an ad for some kind of pipe tobacco. He spills it all right out for 'em. And you just *know* the first thing the cops do is check out the .308 six ways to Sunday and find they're looking to fit that caliber on for a murder up north. And yeah, you got it, those fellas come right on down to Six Corners to look at what they call the "ballistics"—and when them "ballistics" match right up they do a real slow turn over to Elmer and begin to see him in a new kinda light. 'Course all Elmer can give 'em is that dumb stare of his, and the dated receipt that showed when he bought the .308—kinda, uh, *post* Vance, don't you know.

So everybody comes bustlin' over to see ol' Jack at Patten's Hardware. And what's my excuse when they all trot in like they just spotted the winter herd?

No business sense. Nope, none at all. Never had any. Never will.

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"I dunno, it just doesn't seem right somehow," Stone said.

"Doesn't seem right?" *Peters got to his feet like a man with a sore back, motioning for me to follow. He led me down the hallway to the last room on the right, then stood aside. Herby was face-down on the bed, his legs kicking like pistons as he sobbed into a pillow.* "This, *Mister Stone, is what doesn't seem right to me," Peters said . . .*

THE BIKE SNATCHERS

by JOHN CARLSON

I hate to hear a little kid cry as much as the next guy, but this one was getting on my nerves.

"Waaa-aaa-aaa-aaa." The sound gushed from the hallway into the living room like lava. There was a pause for air, then it started again. Another pause, another cry. Pause, cry, pause, cry.

My neck hairs were standing stiff, but I managed a smile for the couple across the coffee table.

"Herby's been this way for two days," Mr. Peters said. He had a worried look—and a curious nose that sprouted from his face like a normal one, then took a hard right at the tip.

I lighted a cigarette to keep from staring, blew some smoke from my own unremarkable nose, and said, "He must have really loved that bicycle."

"Oh, he did!" Mrs. Peters said, flicking a strand of dishwater-blonde hair from her forehead. The skin around her eyes was flushed and puffy. "It was a present from his Grandpa Herby before he passed away."

I nodded soberly, glanced around for an ashtray, and finally pocketed my burnt match. "And you say you know who stole it?"

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"It was that hoodlum, Buddy Jablonski!" she said. "Herby saw the whole thing!"

When I asked why they didn't just go get it, Peters looked like he'd been invited to sail a beer barrel over Niagara Falls. "That whole family is nothing but hoodlums, Mister Stone. My health is poor enough as it is."

"They might take a poke at him," Mrs. Peters added.

I cupped my hand and knocked a bit of ash into it. "Why not call the police?"

"If we got that little Jablonski brute in trouble, he'd make life miserable for Herby," Mrs. Peters said, her eyes brimming with tears. "They're classmates, after all."

Peters folded his hands between his knees and rocked forward. "Well, will you do it, Mister Stone? Will you get Herby's bike back?"

As if on cue, another cry burst forth down the hall—the loudest and longest yet.

"I dunno, it just doesn't seem right somehow," I said.

"Doesn't seem *right?*" Peters got to his feet like a man with a sore back, motioning for me to follow. He led me down the hallway to the last room on the right, then stood aside. Herby was face-down on the bed, his legs kicking like pistons as he sobbed into a pillow.

"*This,* Mister Stone, is what doesn't seem right to me," Peters said.

I studied my feet. "Sure, but—"

"Of course, we're willing to pay you three hundred dollars."

I felt silly cruising slowly by the Jablonski place in the twilight, a grown man on the lookout for a metallic-blue Major Mike Mini Missile with yellow fenders. That feeling ended once I was inside their garage, though. By then I felt stupid.

At dark I'd parked three doors down, unlocked the trunk of my car so I could stow the bike in a hurry, and walked quickly to the structure's side door. It was unlocked. I told myself this was crazy, standing there breathing in the scents of mown grass and motor oil. On the other hand, so was the fact I'd been laid off at the steel mill after twelve hard years.

Crazy, too, was the fact I'd started my own little private-investigations business.

Craziest of all was the bank statement that showed I was entering middle age with $47.00 in savings.

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I felt my way around in the blackness and stumbled into an outdoor grill. It squeaked like church bells squeak.

"Damnit," I whispered, patting my shirt and pants pockets for my penlight. Once it was on, though, I had to smile. There in its beam, smiling back, was Major Mike, mounted on a plastic panel attached to a tiny blue bike. That I allowed myself one deep, easy breath is the only reason I didn't pass out when a motor somewhere in the rafters began whirring, drawing up the garage door.

Ten seconds later I was eyeball-to-eyeball with a set of headlamps, mesmerized.

A man's voice bellowed, "Whada you doing in my garage?" and a kid answered with "Daddy! He's stealing my bicycle!"

I unmesmerized myself in a hurry and made the street in no time, my knees doing a tapdance on the handlebars. At the first intersection I hung a right, dodged a GTO that wanted me for a hood ornament, then coasted to catch my breath. I didn't hear the guy draw up alongside me until he said, "Pull it over, jerkface."

I obliged with a ninety-degree right that shot me over the curb like a Ping-Pong ball, stroked it across three backyards and one disbelieving beagle, and hid myself and the bike in some shrubs at the side of a house.

It was an hour before he quit driving up and down the street and two more before the luminous figures in my digital watch showed midnight. With a precautious peek past the branches, I weasled my way out and hopped aboard, just another thirty-eight-year-old man out for a moonlight spin on his Major Mike Mini Missile.

Even taking the long way, I was at my car in minutes. I stuck the bike in back and got behind the wheel. I was putting my key in the ignition and wondering when the dome light had burned out when somebody said, "Guess who?"

I turned, and saw shooting stars.

Jablonski walked me into the precinct house with my arm behind my back. I knew I was in real trouble when the cop behind the receiving desk said, "Got the bum, eh, Sarge?"

I said, "Sarge?"

He said, "Shut up or I'll hit you again."

We took a rickety elevator to the third floor, then entered a room. There were lots of people and they all wore guns. Now, I'll be the first to admit I hadn't been completely sold on the idea of getting

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Herby his bike back to begin with, but these guys acted as if I'd walked out of Fort Knox with a suitcase full of shiny souvenirs.

Jablonski pushed me into a chair and moved his face to mine. He had hard eyes and a thick forehead. "Hey, big man," he said. "You like to steal little kids' bikes? You like to break little kids' hearts? I like to break big creeps' feet." With that, he stood on mine.

"Ouch!" I hollered. "Honest, this guy 'n' his wife said your kid took it from theirs! He was crying and everything!"

A round, balding man in a perspiration-soaked shirt walked over. "*You* stand on his feet, Blimpo!" someone said.

"How olda you?" Blimpo said in a voice tinged with an unrecognizable accent.

"Thirty-eight."

"Well, good thing we stop you now. Tomorrow, who knows? You mighta gone on to mooning peoples."

He centered one foot on mine, but just as he was about to put his weight on it a door swooshed open behind me and he quickly stepped away.

"Evening, Captain," someone said.

A tall, greying man in a polyester suit took a drink at a water cooler, walked over, and pulled a chair around to face me.

"This Buddy's bike snatcher?" he asked, sitting down.

"The same," Jablonski said.

"You stupid or crazy or what?" he said.

My feet throbbed. "I'm beginning to think so."

"Why'd you decide to pick on a cop's kid in the first place?"

I went through my story again, from the first phone call to lights out on the receiving end of Jablonski's punch.

"And who was it hired you, again?"

"A guy named Peters and his wife."

"We already checked," one of the cops said. "No such person at the address this chump here gave us."

I was beginning to think about what kind of legal aid my $47.00 would buy. "That's who he *said* he was," I said, shaking my head. "A little guy—short, with greasy black hair and something wrong with his nose."

There was a hint of recognition in the captain's face. "What's wrong with his nose?"

"I don't know—it's screwed up at the tip or something, like it was busted once, maybe."

He stared at me a few seconds longer, then got up and motioned

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two other cops to follow him. He was back a quarter hour later with a cup of coffee for me, and a cigarette.

"Okay, Mister Stone," he said, offering me a light. "It's been cleared up. I happen to know the Peters and called them. They confirm what you've said."

Jablonski was on his feet in an instant. "Wait a minute! My kid didn't steal—"

He was cut off in midsentence with a wave of the captain's hand. "Come on, Joe, kids'll be kids. So he wanted a new bike. So what?"

"But he—"

"That's it, Joe," the captain said. "Got it?"

Jablonski sat back down.

The captain drove me to my car in an unmarked police cruiser, then loaded the bike into my car.

"I apologize for my men. They think somebody's messing with another cop or another cop's family they tend to see red."

I said it was no big deal, thanked him, and sat behind the wheel. Knuckles rapped against the window.

"By the way," he said, "the Peters said to tell you to bring the bike over in the morning. It's a bit late, you know?"

"Sure."

"And stay out of cops' garages."

I said I would and left.

Debby woke me up, telling me I lit up her life. Debby Boone, that is. I told her she lit up mine, too, then slapped the off-button on my clock radio. I yawned my way through a shower, put on some clothes, and drank coffee till a decent hour, then headed out the door.

They waited behind the screen door, arm in arm and smiling, as I wheeled the bike up the front walk.

"You've made a little boy very happy," Mrs. Peters said, pulling the bike inside by the handlebars. She headed for the hallway, singing, "*Oooo*, Herby! Herby, darling!"

Peters held the door for me, shuffled over to where a fancy German beer stein was placed on a bookshelf, and pulled a sheaf of bills from inside.

"Just as we agreed, Mister Stone," he said, offering me the money. I pocketed it, told him thanks, shook hands, and walked the few steps to the door. My fingers were wrapped around the knob when he asked if there had been any trouble.

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I laughed, then saw he was serious. "Just that mixup with the cops, but you know all about that."

He paled. "Cops?"

"Yeah, the captain who called, remember?"

He hollered, "Sheila!" and I began to think he didn't remember. An instant later she screamed, "Tony!" and I didn't know what to think. Then someone whose voice I didn't recognize yelled, "Grab that bastard!" and I thought it was time I went home.

Peters had other ideas. He grabbed me from behind and tightened his arm around my neck, getting an elbow in the groin for his trouble. Mrs. Peters was next, rounding the corner from the hallway at full speed with swinging fists. One punch glanced off my chin, so I did the same to her. She went down. I waited for the body belonging to the other voice to show up, but was surprised to see Herby charge into the vestibule—with a gun in his hand.

Yelling something that sounded a lot like Herby's cries, but louder, I launched myself out the door and off the porch. I was digging divots in the lawn, trying to gain traction, when the bullets started flying.

Five feet, fifteen feet, twenty feet. I was sure a bullet would knock me down, but it didn't happen. When I chanced a look behind to see why, Herby was falling to the sidewalk amid a spray of red mist.

"You okay?" the captain said, sliding a revolver into the holster under his suitcoat.

I fought my stomach's urge to pump itself out. "What the heck happened?"

"What happened is we've just busted Tony Reuben and Sheila Wexel, two of the biggest drug dealers this part of the state has ever seen."

I watched as the Peters, or whoever they were, were pushed into the back of a patrol car and driven away. "You're kidding."

"Uh-uh," the captain said, giving me a cigarette. "We came close to getting them six months ago, but they left town. They had a little problem."

"What was that?"

"Somehow they'd been ripped off a half million worth of mob cocaine. Word on the street was they were as good as dead if they didn't make amends."

"So?"

"So we figured they were already fishbait—until Jablonski brought you in and you described the person you were working

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for—the funny nose. Reuben had gotten his almost torn off in a fight as a kid. It healed weird. Made him famous. Anyway, that got us interested in the bike.

"Jablonski's kid bought it at the police auction," he continued. "That means the department had somehow become involved with it. Turned out it had been found abandoned down on the lakefront about six months ago, Anyway, last night we took it apart. You'll never guess what we found."

I didn't try.

"The tubes of the frame were stuffed with plastic pouches of cocaine. The way we figure it, somebody was pedaling it—literally—from buy to buy here in the city. What cop's going to hassle a bicyclist, right? The trouble was, a couple of punks ripped the *bike* off, and we got it. Reuben and Wexel must have figured that out, probably from the description the newspaper ran of the items up for auction. Afterward there was a picture of Buddy Jablonski on his new bike in the paper, too."

"Why didn't they try to get it at the auction?"

"First, somebody might have spotted them. Second, they had no way of knowing if it was a trap or not. We could've already found the dope, right?"

That left me with one question, but I thought I already knew the answer. "Who actually pushed the stuff?"

He nodded to where the kid had fallen.

Suddenly I felt sorry for him. "It isn't fair, getting a kid involved in something like this," I said. "What kind of chance did that little guy have for a decent life?"

"Don't waste too much sympathy on him," the captain said. He led me over, and when he lifted the jacket I didn't want to look. But once I did I couldn't look away.

Even in death, his features were hard, not childlike. Wrinkles crossed his forehead. His upper lip had a shading of bristly hair.

"We think he's killed four, maybe five people," the captain said. "Name's Tommy Malone, but we knew him as Tiny."

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Academia—its halls, its people, its traditions, its intrigues—has been fondly embraced by mystery writers over the years. More than 200 mystery novels use teaching institutions at one level or another as their principal setting, and such fiction has been the subject of a booklength reference work (*College Mystery Novels* by John E. Kramer, Jr., and John E. Kramer III) which annotates more than 50 professional sleuths and over 300 novels that are broadly related to academia.

The latest account of crime in the hallowed halls is *Mortal Term* (Scribners, $12.95), the fourth novel by the ever-improving John Penn. Hugh Roystone is headmaster of Coriston College, a boarding school for teenagers in England's Cotswolds. All goes unwell for the school, which is dependent upon public goodwill and sanitary image for its survival. In addition to an outbreak of drugs and a student pregnancy, Hugh's marriage to a sweet young thing is publicly not flourishing. Now, to cap it off, Hugh is caught substantially in the act of raping a 16-year-old girl. Why, wonders Superintendent Thorne, should so much ill fortune attend Coriston? Penn's tale is a bit slow and confusing at the beginning, but in the end quite tidy and satisfying.

The basic notion of *Dunn's Conundrum* by Stan Lee (Harper & Row, $15.95) is common enough, but its future setting and its development are fresh, witty, and ingenious. Somewhere there is a mole, a traitor, in the Library, an intelligence function which analyzes, integrates, and extrapolates from data collected from every conceivable source. Dunn, head librarian, picks Coolidge to act as official voyeur: everyplace in Washington and half of the rest of the world is bugged with miniature cameras. Coolidge must find the mole, who is apparently leaking defense secrets to Library critics on the Hill, and even to the Russians. This novel may be taken as a statement on the buildup of nuclear weaponry, which it is. But it's also a masterful piece of storytelling.

Mark Hebden's novels about Inspector Pel of the Burgundy region of France have attracted me in the past, and *Pel and the Bombers* (Walker, $12.95) keeps up the excellent work. Pel has two challenges here. In one, a gang is interrupted in the course of a robbery and kills three policemen in their escape. In the other, a teenage boy, son of well-to-do parents, is found smothered in a wooded area. Investigation of these deaths is complicated by a TV newshound who glories in the embarrassment of police, and by Pel's hesitant campaign to win an attractive widow. Stylish, expressive narrative.

Beyond the Mountain by William

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Dieter (Atheneum, $13.95) is a richly evocative story of death in the Colorado of the 1920s. Aaron Hartmann owns a mountainside of timber and grazing land, but one day, during a violent storm, he disappears. Search by his brother Caleb and ranchhands is fruitless, and Aaron is thought to have fallen over a cliff. His son Brock, sowing wild oats in Denver at the time, returns to his domineering mother and uncle Caleb. In him develops a determination to find his father's body, to honor his father's memory by a proper burial. But relationships on the ranch seem to be shifting, and Brock comes to believe Aaron's death was no accident. His probing leads to a graphic and shocking denouement.

New York private eye Kevin Fitzgerald is hired to find a Jewish musician who was thought to have died in Auschwitz in *Coda* by Tom Topor (Scribners, $13.95). Lilli Weill has seen her husband several times around the city—she thinks. Fitzgerald could dismiss her as a semi-senile wishful thinker, but he looks into the matter, following the musical connection, wondering why Max Weill would have failed to make contact with his beloved wife for these forty years, wondering why it seems to be getting dangerous to look for Max.

The plotting is a bit muddled here, and the author's fondness for Fitzgerald's sexual calisthenics is a thumping bore, but the ending —an emphatic, bloody, and memorable one—made me forget my earlier reservations.

There always seems room for another California private eye. Such as Fiddler, in *Just Another Day in Paradise* (Doubleday, $14.95) by A. E. Maxwell. Fiddler has more money than he can spend and an ex-wife he's still in lust with, and he private peeps for the pleasure—and the danger—of it. Said ex-wife here asks him to help her twin brother, who lacks her intelligence and judgment and is in deep trouble with a Silicon Valley export scam. Fiddler can't overlook the lady's current lover, smoothest of the smooth and owner of the export company. Nor, for that matter, can he ignore cop types and killer types, plus the odd deadly patriot. Good action suspense.

John Malcom is an antique collector and author of price guides to antique furniture in England, and now the writer of one well crafted mystery: *A Back Room in Somers Town* (Scribners, $12.95). Tim Simpson knows a bit about art and is consequently invited aboard Jeremy White's financial steamship as an investment advisor. He comes across a pair of early Twentieth Century paintings in the hands of a fast-footed dealer. But not fast-footed enough: someone sticks a paper knife in his heart and debunks with the artwork. The paintings weren't really worth killing for, but Simpson, finding the odor of fish about, follows his nose into the reaches of Jeremy White's banking family in Brazil. Willing wenches provide relaxation and peril along the way, and art history is beautifully integrated into the plot.

Eric Wright's debut, *The Night*

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the Gods Smiled (1983), introduced Inspector Charlie Salter of the Toronto police and was selected as best mystery of the year by the Crime Writers Association in England. Wright and Salter are both well met again in *Smoke Detector* (Scribners, $12.95). Salter, you may recall, was shelved for the presumed stupidity of picking the losing side in a political fracas. Occasionally, inadvertently, the investigation of a crime is allowed to drift his way—probably in the hope he'll botch it and remove all doubt. Here someone sets fire to a junque shop, incinerating its owner, and, as the regular homicide cops are otherwise engaged, the case comes to Charlie, temporarily of course. While trying to figure out what to do about his young son's discovery of skin magazines, Salter pokes about in the shabby affairs of the dead man. It seems there's something odd about an old chest and some Japanese artwork it contained . . .

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"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE

by LORRAINE REINHARDT

There was a young male detective,
Whose methods proved most effective—
He sat in a chair
And without turning a hair
Solved mysteries by being reflective.

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COLD DECK

by JOHN DOBBYN

I could tell by the wince of his snow-burned eyes
As he pushed through that swinging door
That he'd come from those God-forgot trails to the north;
He was weathered and tried to the core.
He stood like a fool in the frame of the door,
Struck dumb by the glare and the din,
Till one of the girls in that Dawson saloon
Took his arm and escorted him in.
There wasn't much flesh you could see on his face
Through the hair that was matted and grey,
He was probably thirty years old though you'd swear
He was sixty and more if a day.
And I thought as I dealt out the blackjack
That once this poor grizzly sight
Was a babe that a mother could cuddle and hold—
My God, if she saw him tonight!
From his clothes cut from skins to the wild in his eyes
Where the Yukon had woven its spell,
He looked like those bears that you see in the zoos—
Out of place as a snowman in hell.
The girl had a two-handed grip on his arm,
Like a shark going in for the kill,
That said to the others, "Stay back, this one's mine."
He just stared at her, dumbstruck and still.
You could see from the way that he shied from her touch
It was probably more than a year
Since he'd talked to a human or seen one at that,
Much less felt a young woman that near.
But those girls in the Yukon were savvy to men;
They could spot a good mark for a mile.
She just steered him across to the end of the bar
And played on his mind with her smile.

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As the evening wore on in that noisy saloon,
I could see the enchantment take hold—
All the rough, raucous laughter and smoke of that crowd
Just dissolved in his vision of gold.
He looked in those eyes that were caked in mascara
And that face that was frozen in paint,
And the face that he saw was as loving and warm
And as soft as the face of a saint.
He stayed till the bar was shut down for the night,
Paying nuggets to buy her champagne,
And he left in a cloud, so I wasn't surprised
When he showed up the next night again.
And so it went on every night for a week,
Till his heart, soul, and mind were enslaved—
She knew that he'd willingly pay for her love
With every last nugget he'd saved.
I knew she was after much more than champagne,
Though I never knew quite how much more,
And I figured for sure that all hell would break loose
When she finally sprung the trap door.
Well, it happened a week to the day from the night
That he first met the love of his life.
They were sitting alone when he took out a ring
And I heard the words "marriage" and "wife."
There were some who might laugh and then some who might cry
At the sight of that poor simple fool,
But she didn't do either, for back of those eyes
Was a mind that was scheming and cool.
She put on the ring just to build up his hopes
And gave him a sad, plaintive look,
Then she spun out a story she'd planned in advance,
Like a fisherman setting the hook.
She told him she'd come from a town in the south
That was raided by renegade Sioux,
She was captured and held as a squaw by a buck
Who'd mistreated and beaten her blue.
And that's where she'd be till the day that she died
If it hadn't been her kind of luck
That a trader had found her and paid a high price
To ransom her back from that buck.

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She was deep in his debt, and when he came north
To open this miners' saloon,
She had promised to work till the debt was paid off,
And it wouldn't be paid very soon.
Well, the stranger got up and went straight to the back
Where Mike Slade was involved in a game,
And he said to him, "Slade, you've got something I want—
"I can pay any price that you name.
"So figure how much it'll take to wipe clean
"Any debt that the lady might owe.
"I'll be leaving for good, and I figure she'll come
"With me when I'm ready to go."
Old Mike just sat back and he chewed his cigar,
As if trying to think the thing through,
And that was a joke, 'cause I heard her and Mike
Making plans about what they would do.
Then he said to the stranger, "I can't let her go
"For a price like a dog or a horse,
"But I guess we could leave it to fate to decide
"If she's better in my hands or yours.
"We could both try our luck at some two-handed stud,
"And we'll play until one is stripped clean—
"And the one who gets up with the other man's gold
"Is the man who walks off with the queen."
Well, the stranger agreed, but as I see it now
He had damn little choice but to play,
So the game was begun, and they traded the pots
Till the sun was well up the next day.
Then at last it came down to the moment of truth—
They had both drawn a hand they could back.
They both started to bet, and the tension got high,
And the crowd gathered round in a pack.
The stranger was sitting with three little fours
And jacks to round out a full house;
The lady was standing in back of his chair
With an eye on his cards like a mouse.
Then she looked up at Slade, and he gave her a sign
That he sat with three queens and two threes,
And she flashed him a wink that said, Bet to the hilt—
You can take him, so put on the squeeze.

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And I sensed that the stranger went rigid and cold,
Though he never so much as looked back,
And I wondered if maybe he noticed that wink
In reflections from glass on the rack.
When it came to his turn, Slade had bet all he owned,
So the choice was the stranger's to make.
I guess that he couldn't quite come to believe
That she'd play him for all she could take
'Cause he reached in his shirt and he took out a poke
Full of gold that he threw in the pot,
And he laid down his cards, and then Slade laid down his,
And the stranger looked froze to the spot.
Old Slade wore a grin that was splitting his face,
And the girl ran around to his side—
The hurt and the pain in the stranger's eyes turned
To a hate that was too deep to hide.
He stood up and walked out and I figured he'd head
Back out to that wilderness land,
But in five minutes' time he came back through the doors
With a Colt forty-five in his hand.
He shouted out, "Slade!" and the music froze cold
And the miners backed off to the wall.
"Get ready to die" was the last thing I heard,
Then a shot, and I saw the man fall.
Slade was still in his chair, and he held in his hand
The gun that he kept in his boot
And the smoke that was curling out of the end
Told me he was the first one to shoot.
I got to the stranger and lifted his head.
The bullet had shattered his belt.
There was nothing to say but he saw in my eyes
The pity and shame that I felt.
I yelled for a cloth and some ice from the bar,
But he lifted his hand in a wave.
He said, "Never mind, it's too late and besides,
I've got nothing left worth being saved."
Then he hoisted himself and he looked back at Slade
And the woman who stood by his side.
He whispered, "The Yukon will pay my last debt,"
And he squeezed my fist hard, and he died.

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I reached for the gun that he'd dropped to the floor
And the weight of it struck me as queer,
So I checked every chamber and found them as empty
As yesterday's barrels of beer.
It puzzled me then and for some time to come
Why a man would walk into a fight
With a gun that was harmless as watered-down gin,
But he did what he figured was right.
Mike Slade had his men take the body out back
And strip it to see what they'd find,
And they found that he'd taped to the skin on his chest
A map to the claim that he'd mined.
Well, that was the last that I saw of Mike Slade—
He was gone 'fore the body grew cold—
And the woman went with him, the both of them hungry
And burning with lust for the gold.
The rest of the story I heard from some trappers
Who came into town the next spring.
They'd been out in the ice-crusted valleys up north
When they'd spotted a hell-driven thing—
A team of eight dogs that were lathered in sweat
From the pace and the bite of the lash,
Driven on by a man on the rails of the sled,
Leaving tracks in the snow like a gash.
The powdery snow billowed up like a cloud
And it shrouded the sled in a fog,
But the trappers could make out a womanly form
Lying back on the sled like a log,
And they watched as it raced on a definite course
To the crest that was buried in snow.
They were helpless to warn that the crest was a cliff
That fell off to the boulders below.
And the stark, gaping jaws of that mountain divide
Lay in wait as the dogs reached the ledge—
And they fought to hold back, but the weight of the sled
Carried dogs and all over the edge.
By the time that the trappers got down to the sled
The bodies were both frozen stiff,
But they found in the ice-encased hand of the man
The map that led straight to that cliff.

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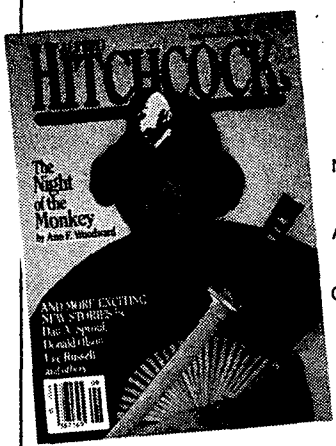
When I saw it I knew it belonged to the man
Who lost all that he loved on a bet
And I knew what he meant when he said as he died
That the Yukon would pay his last debt.
They've got sheriffs and judges and courts in the States
To enforce all their criminal law,
But the Yukon has ways that can put them to shame
For justice that's swift, straight, and raw.

A special offer for mystery fans...



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a *NEW* Pierre Chambrun story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Pierre Chambrun, manager of New York's vast and prestigious Hotel Beaumont, made his debut in 1962 in a novel titled The Cannibal Who Overate. *A few months ago, Dodd, Mead published* Murder Round the Clock, *a baker's dozen of Chambrun short stories, all of which previously appeared in EQMM between 1963 and 1982. In introducing the first of the stories in the collection, "Murder Deluxe," in the October 1963 issue, Ellery Queen described Pierre Chambrun as "a man with tact and perception, whose dark eyes could be those of a Good Samaritan or a hanging judge—a man who can be charmingly European or briskly American—a man who will not tolerate the slightest deviation from superb service or established routine, whether it is a minor complaint from a transient guest—or murder."*

Twenty-two years later, Pierre Chambrun remains a constant in an inconstant world . . .

CHAMBRUN DEFENDS HIS MAN

by **HUGH PENTECOST**

Imagine, if you can, being on a magnificent cruise ship headed for some glamorous South Sea island when a storm strikes. The wind tosses the ship on mountainous waves. You glance up at the bridge, and to your horror you see there's no one at the wheel, which is spinning out of control. The captain is gone and no first mate has taken his place.

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That's the way it was on a spring day in the Hotel Beaumont, New York's top luxury hotel, when violence struck.

The Beaumont is almost perfectly organized. An expert, personally trained by Pierre Chambrun, the legendary manager, is in charge of every department. Computers fully informed about the hotel's functionings are within arm's reach. I am the public-relations director for the Beaumont. I have at my disposal all the information I need about every guest and every special function planned. I feel completely confident of my ability to handle any situation that may come my way—but it helps to know that if I fail in any way, the Man, Pierre Chambrun, is ready to bail me out. It gives you courage to walk a high wire when you know there's a safety net to catch you if you fall.

The day that this began, though, that net had been removed. Chambrun wasn't on hand. The next-in-command was in charge and not one of us failed to wonder what would happen if we made a mistake.

Chambrun had given us all a bad scare on a beautiful May morning three days earlier by collapsing in his second-floor office. Dr. Partridge, the house physician, feared that he'd suffered a heart attack and rushed him by ambulance to St. Vincent's Hospital. There, a more complete examination revealed that Chambrun's heart was undamaged but that he had a solid case of viral pneumonia. He would be hospitalized for at least a week.

There were no serious problems confronting the rest of us at the hotel at the time. By us I mean Betsy Ruysdale, Chambrun's fabulous secretary, who knows every intimate detail about the hotel's management and personnel; Jerry Dodd, in charge of security, a tough little ex-FBI agent who eats crooks for breakfast; and myself, Mark Haskell. Every department, kitchens to health club, had competent professionals in charge.

It might have alarmed the man in the street that we had a guest who was a target for terrorists, but that wasn't unusual at the Beaumont. The hotel is a kind of home away from home for diplomats and political leaders from all over the world. Protecting them from attack by political or religious enemies is routine. But that May morning, with Chambrun in the hospital, someone's foot slipped and Sir Edward Bromley, one of Britain's top government people, was shot to death in his suite on the thirtieth floor. The Irish Republican Army claimed credit for the assassination almost at once, but the fact remained that a gunman had walked in and out of the hotel,

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in and out of Sir Edward's suite, right under the noses of Jerry Dodd's security people and Sir Edward's private bodyguards.

I had seen quite a bit of Sir Edward Bromley during the few hours just preceding his murder. The Townsend Wallingfords were giving a coming-out party for their daughter Sandra in the Beaumont's grand ballroom and it was my job to make certain no single detail went wrong. It was all very posh, with gallons of champagne and other liquors flowing freely just for the asking. I never saw so many beautiful young girls gathered in one place at the same time. Sir Edward Bromley and his male secretary, a young man named Neville Clegg, were among the guests. Bromley was a man in his late fifties, but there was a youthful charm to the man, a casual elegance. He was graceful on the dance floor and had a charming smile. The debutantes were very aware of him and of Neville Clegg, who was nearer their age. And when, shortly after midnight, Sir Edward mounted the bandstand and gestured for silence to a roll of drums, you could sense their expectancy.

" 'Coming out' is a glamorous and very jolly business," he said when he had their attention. "I wish I could stay longer, but unfortunately tomorrow is a heavy workday for me and I must say goodnight. But I did want to say that if any of you are in London in the near future, I hope to be there to provide you with as much pleasure as you have given me tonight."

As he stepped down, the young people applauded. Bromley and Clegg left, the champagne continued to flow, the dance band played on—and less than half an hour later Sir Edward Bromley was dead.

I was watching a particularly pretty girl trying to deal with a broken sandal strap when Mike Maggio, the night bell-captain, tugged at my sleeve. "There's hell to pay," he said.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

"Someone shot Sir Edward Bromley when he got to his suite," Mike said. "He's dead."

"You're kidding." But my face must have told him I knew he wasn't.

"You're wanted up there," Mike said. "Every reporter in the civilized world is going to be on the case in about ten minutes."

Chambrun would have been in charge at any other time.

I could sense the tension in the lobby. The word had started to spread out there. I took an elevator to the thirtieth floor, and as I

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stepped off I was confronted by a uniformed cop who wasn't part of Jerry Dodd's security force.

"Who are you?" he asked me.

"Mark Haskell, head of public relations for the hotel. I was told I was wanted in Sir Edward Bromley's suite."

He glanced at a slip of paper in his hand. "That checks out," he said. "Mr. Tranter is expecting you."

"Who's he?"

"CIA," the cop said. "He's in charge."

Another policeman let me into Suite 30B. In the living room, the first thing I saw was the body covered with a blood-splotched sheet. Jerry Dodd was there with Lieutenant Walter Hardy, a homicide cop from the local precinct I knew from past experience. There were some other cops and a man who had to be Tranter. In a far corner, Neville Clegg sat on the couch, his shoulders heaving. Jerry Dodd took me aside.

"You're going to have to handle the Press, Mark," he said.

"What the hell happened?"

"There's been a phone call from someone claiming to be a member of the Irish Republican Army—"

"I heard. Is that all?"

"Clegg said he and Sir Edward came back to the suite and found a man here who claimed to be a chauffeur assigned to Sir Edward by the Towsend Wallingfords."

"I don't understand."

"The Wallingfords have a fleet of cars here, ready to transport their guests to wherever they want to go after the party."

"But Bromley *was* home."

"I know. This *chauffeur* pulled a gun, shot Bromley twice in the head, and took off."

"So how did he get into the suite, past your people and Bromley's bodyguards? And how did he get away after the shooting?"

"That's the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question," Jerry said unhappily. "I'm hoping Clegg can tell us a little more."

I was introduced to Seldon Tranter, the CIA man. He was dark and slender, with the coldest blue eyes I've ever seen.

"I thought it would be best for you to hear the story first-hand, Mr. Haskell," he said to me. "But nothing is to be passed on to the Press until I tell you what can be told and what can't. Understand?"

"Yes."

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Neville Clegg was pulling himself together with great effort. Tranter turned to him.

"Mr. Clegg—you and Sir Edward left the ballroom when?"

"Sir Edward asked me to let him know when it was twelve-thirty. After he made a short farewell speech and said his goodnights, we came upstairs."

" 'We' meaning just the two of you?"

"And Parker," Clegg said, nodding toward a man in plainclothes who was standing with the uniformed policemen.

"I'm one of Sir Edward's bodyguards," the man named Parker said. "I went to the party with him and came back upstairs with him. We checked with the man who was guarding the hall outside the suite and he told us the coast was clear. I stayed outside with the guard and Sir Edward and Mr. Clegg came inside."

"You heard the gunshots?" Tranter asked.

"He wouldn't," Jerry Dodd said. "Every suite in the hotel is soundproof."

Parker nodded. "I didn't hear anything, didn't know anything had happened until Mr. Clegg dashed out and told us."

We looked at Clegg.

"We went into the suite," he said. "We were somewhat startled to see this man in a chauffeur's uniform waiting for us, but the Wallingfords had told us there would be a car available for us if we wanted to go somewhere after the party and we both supposed he was their man and had been let in by one of the guards. Sir Edward thanked him and said we wouldn't be going anywhere tonight.

" 'I think you'll be going somewhere where the fires are hot, Bromley,' the man said. He was suddenly pointing what looked like a cannon at Sir Edward, and before I could think what to do he opened fire." Clegg turned away. "I could have lunged at him or tried to shield Sir Edward. Instead I dove for the floor. The next thing I knew Sir Edward was beside me. I didn't have to be told he was dead. The assassin was gone."

"He had to go the back way, didn't he? The service area and elevator? He couldn't have gone out the front door. Parker and the other guard were in the front hall."

"I suppose."

"You'd know this man if you saw him again?"

Clegg hesitated. "I'm not sure. The peak of his cap was pulled down low over his forehead. He was wearing black glasses. If I saw him dressed in that uniform, with that chauffeur's cap pulled down

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over his forehead, and wearing those glasses, I might—otherwise, I don't know."

Tranter focused on Jerry Dodd. "Surely the service area and the service elevator were covered," he said.

"By my men," Jerry said in a flat voice.

"Was the back door of this suite open for people to come and go?"

"No, it was locked," Jerry said.

"You mean you couldn't get in if you wanted to?"

"I could get in if I wanted to," Jerry said. "I have a master key. The man in charge also has a master key."

"Where is he?"

"I've sent for him," Jerry said. "He should be here any minute."

"Name?"

Jerry's lips tightened. "McCoy. Tim McCoy. He's worked for me here for ten years."

Tranter's pale eyes widened. "McCoy's an Irish name. You mean to say you had an Irishman guarding a man who'd been threatened by the IRA?"

"Tim is Boston Irish," Jerry said. "An American."

The door at the far end of the room opened and Tim McCoy was ushered in by a policeman. "Sorry to be late," Tim said when Jerry introduced him to Tranter. "I was doing some checking."

"On what?" Tranter asked.

"I was told there was a guy in a chauffeur's uniform," Tim said. "He sure as hell didn't come up or go out the back way."

"How can you be sure?" Tranter asked.

"I was on the service elevator all evening," Tim said. "No one of any description came to this floor with me. I had a man at the fire stairs on this floor, the floor above, and the floor below. No one got *to* this floor from anywhere, or *left* this floor to go anywhere."

"You have a master key to the back door of this suite?" Tranter asked.

"Yes, I do," Tim said.

"Did you lend it to anyone?"

"No."

"You're Irish, aren't you, McCoy?"

"My parents were Irish. I was born in Boston."

"You know the IRA has claimed credit for killing Sir Edward?"

Tim frowned. "I hadn't heard that."

"Would it surprise you to hear that I'm concerned to find that an

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Irishman once removed is in charge of protecting one access to a man who has been threatened by the IRA?"

Tim observed Tranter carefully. "Well, this Irishman can assure you that no one came into this suite or left it by the back way."

"I trust Mr. McCoy completely," Jerry Dodd said.

"Obviously," Tranter said, "or you wouldn't have put him in charge."

"Mr. Chambrun approved my stationing McCoy where I did," Jerry said.

"Mr. Chambrun is in the hospital."

"Our plans for protecting Sir Edward were made before Mr. Chambrun was taken ill."

Tim McCoy was staring at Tranter. "Are you charging me with being responsible for what happened?"

"I'm holding you on suspicion of murder," Tranter said, "or being an accomplice to murder."

Tim looked at Hardy, our friend from Homicide. "Can he do that, Lieutenant?"

Hardy didn't look happy. "He's in charge, Tim. The facts may justify him for the moment."

"What facts? That I'm Irish?"

"And that the killer was Irish," Tranter reminded him.

"Think about it, Tim," Lieutenant Hardy said. "This chauffeur couldn't have come in the front entrance. It was guarded by one of Jerry's men and one of Sir Edward's bodyguards. One of them couldn't have let the killer into this suite without the other one knowing it. So he had to get in the back way. You ran the service elevator and you had a pass key to the back door. If I didn't know you, I'd be thinking just as Tranter thinks. Knowing you, I'll be looking for some other way it could have been managed."

Tranter turned to Jerry Dodd. "Replace those men who are guarding the fire stairs and bring them in here for questioning."

As Jerry left, the phone rang. One of the policemen answered it.

"It's a message for you, Mr. Haskell," he said.

"The Press," Tranter muttered.

I took the phone. It was Mrs. Veach, the chief operator on the hotel switchboard. "Mr. Chambrun just called from the hospital, Mark. He wants you over there right away."

Pierre Chambrun, wearing a white hospital gown, propped up in his hospital bed with a plastic tube inserted in his nose, did not look

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his usual dapper self, but the black eyes, buried in deep pouches, were as bright as newly minted dimes.

He listened attentively as I told him Neville Clegg's story of what had happened. When I came to Tranter's suspicion of Tim McCoy, Chambrun was furious.

"Utterly absurd!" he said.

"I know," I said. "But you and I and Jerry and Lieutenant Hardy may not believe that Tim is guilty because we know him. To an outsider, there's enough cause for suspicion."

"Enough to keep that outsider from looking elsewhere for the right answer?" Chambrun said.

"The killer in the chauffeur's uniform couldn't have come in the front way," I repeated. "That leaves the service entrance—and Tim."

Chambrun shifted impatiently in the bed. "There's one thing you haven't said was mentioned by Mr. Tranter.—When Sir Edward was at the Wallingford's party, the men protecting his suite knew he wasn't in it, knew where he was. One of the guards in the front hall could have left his post, perfectly legitimately, to go to the john or call his family on the phone. If the other was a traitor, it would have been quite simple to slip the chauffeur in the front way. Check on that, Mark. Have Jerry and Lieutenant Hardy ask if one of those men left the other one alone at any time."

"And if one of them did?"

"Then the back way wasn't the only way. Same thing for any of Tim's men on the fire stairs. With Sir Edward not in his suite, a few minutes away from his post might have seemed legitimate."

"How could he get in the back way without Tim's or Jerry's key?" I asked.

"Good question—if it was locked on the inside."

"Clegg says it was."

"Does he know that? Did he try it himself or did he just assume it because it was supposed to be?" Chambrun put his head back against the pillows, exasperated. "A good lawyer can throw enough doubts on Tranter's case against Tim to force him to look somewhere else. But I don't want it to come to that."

"Suppose we're wrong about Tim," I said. "I don't fully understand this Irish thing. Isn't it possible he could be involved in a way we—"

Chambrun interrupted. "I base my whole operation at the hotel on never being wrong about people. The day I put my trust in the wrong man for any job is the day I retire. I tell you, Tim McCoy

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didn't kill Sir Edward Bromley and he wasn't an accomplice in the killing."

"Chambrun wants you to interrogate everyone who was guarding the suite, front *or* back," I told Jerry. "One of them could legitimately have left his post when Sir Edward wasn't there and the other could have let the killer in."

"Could have let him in any time while Sir Edward was at the Wallingford's party," Jerry said. "But then he had to get him out after the shooting. It couldn't have been by the front way, Mark. My man and Parker, Sir Edward's bodyguard, were both outside in the hall. He'd have to go out the back way."

"Where Tim and his three men were on the job."

"The three men on the fire stairs swear no one passed them all evening," Jerry said, "and I believe them. That leaves Tim running the service elevator. The men on the fire stairs can't watch the elevator. And they had no reason to because Tim was running it. The only way that chauffeur can have gotten out, uncaught, was if the man operating the elevator was an ally. That man was Tim, whether we like it or not."

"I don't."

"Tranter has an even more uncomfortable theory," Jerry said. "He thinks Tim was the actual killer, that all he had to do was dispose of the chauffeur getup and stay put on the elevator."

I could hear Chambrun saying, "I tell you Tim McCoy didn't kill Sir Edward Bromley." I said, "We've got to find another answer."

Jerry nodded. "I wish I knew where to start looking."

It was now about four o'clock in the morning. Among Chambrun's instructions had been to check with the limousine service the Wallingfords had hired to transport their guests. The drivers assigned to the party should be questioned and looked at by Neville Clegg on the chance that he might recognize one as the killer. Jerry Dodd set out to do that, not hopeful.

Betsy Ruysdale was to make copies of the registration cards of all guests who had signed in at the Beaumont after Chambrun was taken to the hospital. Chambrun probably knew more about the guests in his hotel than their own families did. It was his daily routine after breakfast to check new registrations in my presence and Betsy's. It was my job to know if a guest wanted privacy or publicity. Chambrun wrote symbols on the cards indicating what a

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guest's credit status was, if he or she was an alcoholic, if he was a woman chaser or if she was a man chaser. Occasionally he added the initials P.C., which meant that Chambrun knew something about the guest that he didn't choose to reveal. For the last three days Chambrun hadn't seen those cards to add his input to them.

"I have copies of those cards ready for you," Betsy told me, "and Pierre just called. More orders for you, Mark."

"Oh?"

"Can you persuade Neville Clegg to come see him at the hospital? You're to tell him Chambrun feels terribly responsible for what's happened and very much wants to hear the story first hand from Clegg—he might be able to ask a question that hasn't been asked and learn something that's been overlooked."

"Will the police let him go?"

"I think Chambrun has talked to Lieutenant Hardy," Betsy said.

Neville Clegg sat in his bedroom in Suite 30B and looked at me with still-bloodshot eyes when I told him of Chambrun's request.

"I'm ready to collapse, Haskell," he said. "But if you think I might be of some help—"

"Chambrun is something of a genius at puzzles," I said.

He shrugged. "If the police will let me go—"

"Lieutenant Hardy has approved," I told him.

A police car was waiting for us in the hotel's basement garage. I suddenly realized that they thought Clegg might be another target for the professed killers. He might be able to identify the assassin.

We were taken to the hospital and led under police protection to Chambrun's room. Chambrun was awake and he had a guest. Lieutenant Hardy was sitting in a chair beside the bed. The tube had been removed from Chambrun's nose and he looked, somehow, superalert.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Clegg," Chambrun said. "Have a seat. Lieutenant Hardy happened to stop by to inquire for my health. Do you mind if he stays?"

"Why should I?" Clegg said. "I can't tell you anything I haven't already told him."

"Will you tell me so I can hear it for myself?"

"Of course." Clegg told the same story I'd heard before. He and Sir Edward had left the party, gone up to their suite, been admitted by the guards, and found the "chauffeur" waiting for them. Sir Edward had told the man he wouldn't be needed since they wouldn't

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be going anywhere, and the killer had drawn his gun, said Sir Edward would be going somewhere the fires were hot, and opened fire.

"I'll never get over the shame of my behavior," Clegg said. "I should have tried to protect Sir Edward, but instead I hit the floor and covered my head. When I looked up, Sir Edward was dead and the man was gone."

"You saw him go?"

Clegg shook his head and gave Chambrun a bitter smile. "I'm afraid I was covering my head, waiting to be executed."

"Then you ran out into the front hall and told the guards what had happened?"

"Yes. Obviously the chauffeur had gone out the back way, or he'd have been stopped."

"He'd have been stopped if he went out the back way," Chambrun corrected him.

"Not by that Irish terrorist on your security force," Clegg said. "Either that man or an ally of his must have been the assassin."

"I've been in this business for nearly thirty years, Mr. Clegg," Chambrun said. "I've been a success at it because I'm an expert judge of people. Tim McCoy is no more an Irish terrorist than I am."

"Well, I know the chauffeur didn't go out the front way," Clegg said. "I trust the men who were out there. The back was guarded by your people. *You* may trust them, but that has to be the way the killer left."

Chambrun's eyes narrowed. "If he left," he said.

"What are you talking about?" Clegg demanded. "He left!"

"I don't think he was ever there," Chambrun said.

"What the hell are you talking about? Of course he was there! I saw him! He shot Sir Edward!"

"Does the name Annabelle mean anything to you?" Chambrun asked quietly.

Clegg's face turned the color of ashes.

"I have contacts in London," Chambrun said. "I've been in touch with them. It's a civilized time of day over there. They tell me that you had a sister named Annabelle. She committed suicide about a year ago with a gun she found in your apartment. She was unmarried—and pregnant."

"Damn you," Clegg said.

"Among the men she had been seen with quite often was Sir Edward Bromley. What happened? Did he walk out on her?"

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Clegg turned to Lieutenant Hardy. "I've had enough, Lieutenant. Digging up my sister's tragedy, trying to tie it in with—"

"I trust my people," Chambrun said. "I know no 'chauffeur' left your suite. I know no 'chauffeur' gained access to that suite to wait for you. In short, I know there never was a chauffeur. You chose that opportunity to murder the man who destroyed your sister and you invented the 'chauffeur' to cover your tracks. What did you do with the gun, Clegg?"

"You're crazy," Clegg said. "The police and the CIA searched the suite, the hotel—"

"Did they search you, Mr. Clegg?"

Clegg made a quick move, but Hardy had been waiting and was ready. He brought a .45-caliber handgun out of the holster under Clegg's jacket.

"Ballistics will tell you that's the gun that killed Sir Edward," Chambrun told him.

"Thanks, Pierre," Hardy said.

Chambrun turned to me. "Ask the nurse to come in, will you, Mark? Time for me to get hooked up again. And tell Tim McCoy thanks for helping me solve the case."

"How?" Clegg asked in a shaken voice.

"By being the man I knew he was," Chambrun said.

"Q"

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"Arthur will come to his senses," Edith said. "Wait and see. Right now he's so overcome with grief he doesn't know what he's doing . . ."

LYDIA'S HOUSE

by VIRGINIA M. GILLETTE

They could hear scuffling and then a giggle as they stood at the door waiting. Edith turned to Henry.

"Wouldn't you think they could answer the door?"

"I told you it was too soon. We should have given them time to settle in."

"Nonsense." She jabbed the doorbell again. Chimes sounded and dogs barked.

"Did you hear that?" Edith peered at Henry with wide, startled eyes.

He shrugged. "What about it?"

"Dogs," she moaned. "Dogs in Lydia's house."

"You must remember, Edith, this is no longer Lydia's house," he spoke the words as if it pleased him to say them.

Suddenly the porchlight revealed them and the white paneled door opened. Arthur stood there, disheveled and trying to tuck in his shirttail.

"Edith! Henry! How nice. Come on in."

Edith stepped across the threshold at once but Henry hesitated. "We just stopped to welcome you home. We'll continue our walk."

"Oh, no," Arthur said. "You've got to come in and meet Steve."

"Steve?" Edith raised her eyebrows.

"Stephanie, but everyone calls her Steve. Come on, Henry, come in."

They stood uncertainly on the white-marble vestibule floor until Arthur closed the front door behind them and led them into the hall. There, reflected in the ornate antique mirror on the wall behind her, a young woman held two bouncy, straining Brittany Spaniels by their collars.

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Not so young at that, Edith decided as she noted the lines around the woman's mouth and under her eyes and the streaks of grey in her close-cropped hair. But she was certainly dressed young—shiny orange stretch slacks clinging like the paper on the wall, olive-silk overblouse patterned with splashy orange flowers and a cleavage deep enough to make Henry's eyes glisten as she bent over the dogs. She even had dangly orange and green earrings. Edith shuddered, remembering Lydia's beautifully cut, simple little basic blacks.

"Let the dogs go, honey, they'll be all right," Arthur said. "I want you to meet our good friends and neighbors, Edith and Henry Wilburding."

Freed, the dogs clattered across the floor digging their nails into the polished parquet. They sniffed Edith's feet and turned to Henry, who stooped and gathered them into his arms.

"Henry, you'll be covered with hair," Edith said.

"They do shed," Stephanie agreed.

Which was the understatement of the evening. Tufts of hair were already clinging to Henry's navy slacks and when they all moved into the living room, Edith noticed clumps of dog hair on the oyster-white carpeting and even on the rose-satin love seat next to the fireplace. And the fireplace! Edith's eyes widened with horror as she took in the sacrilege.

Where before there had never been anything but three neat, unlit birch logs in the winter and a golden pleated fan in the summer, a huge snapping fire now burned. Cushions were thrown carelessly on the floor in front of it and a tray holding soiled cups and dishes had been pushed partway under Lydia's inlaid mother-of-pearl coffee table. And the desk. Dear God! Lydia's lovely little fruitwood desk was piled high with books and magazines and leaning recklessly against one leg was a black and tan guitar.

Stephanie sat down on the brocade couch and pulled her feet up under her. "Do sit down, Edith. It was so thoughtful of you and Henry to call. I want you to tell me all about Arthur. I've never been married before and I mean to be the perfect wife."

"Then you didn't know him before Lydia—?"

"Not really. He used to come into the bookstore and we'd talk, but it wasn't until afterward that he got serious."

"It seemed rather sudden," Edith said.

Stephanie grinned. "We're not getting any younger—and I want children."

"Children!"

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"At least one, maybe two." Stephanie laughed. "Twins would be dandy."

Edith gulped, picturing Lydia's hand-painted nosegays on the staircase wall dappled with jellied fingerprints.

The dogs flopped down on the cushions in front of the fire and the men came from the kitchen with drinks.

When the door closed behind them, Edith said, "I'm glad we didn't see the rest of the house. I couldn't have borne it."

"First time I've ever felt comfortable in that showplace," Henry said.

"How can you talk that way, Henry? Don't you know what that house meant to Lydia?"

"I keep telling you. It isn't Lydia's house any more."

"Arthur will come to his senses, wait and see. Right now he's so overcome with grief he doesn't know what he's doing."

Henry took his pipe from his pocket and stopped to light it.

Edith wrinkled her nose. "Must you, Henry?"

"Don't worry," he said, "I'll finish it outside." He chuckled. "Good old Art, I didn't think he had it in him."

"You men make me sick. The first pretty face that comes along—"

"The figure's not bad, either," Henry said.

"Lydia had a very nice figure."

Henry shrugged. "I never noticed."

"Well, I'm going in. Finish your pipe and don't forget to wipe your feet and lock up and turn out the lights."

Edith's thoughts kept returning to the house next door. She was so disturbed by what she had seen and her feeling of loss was so great that she scarcely slept, and the next morning she failed to achieve any satisfaction in her work. Usually, no matter what kind of mood she was in, putting her house in order cheered her, but today even the joy of placing each crystal-clear glass in its proper spot failed to lighten her. Finally, she decided to go next door and offer Stephanie a helping hand. After all, she had asked for advice.

"Let's have a cup of coffee," Stephanie said.

"No, thank you," Edith told her, beginning to dry the dishes still in the drainer. "Lydia had such lovely things," she said. "Arthur wanted to get a dishwasher but she wouldn't hear of it. She insisted on washing her dishes with her own hands." Carrying some of the crystal into the dining room, she ran her fingers lovingly along the smooth top of the mahogany table, touched the silver basket of ruby glass grapes, and moved on into the living room.

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"She had such exquisite taste," she continued, "and Arthur indulged her. Of course, he came to appreciate lovely things, too. A man likes to have a beautiful, serene home and it doesn't get that way by chance. You have to work at it. And Lydia did. Some of her furniture is custom made exactly the way she wanted it. It took her weeks, sometimes months to find the right picture, the right fabric." She moved closer to Stephanie. "Don't you see? It's a trust—a sacred trust that's been handed to you." She gazed across the shattered room. "Come, I'll help you put it back in order."

From then on, Edith went next door every day to help Stephanie—and she had to admit Stephanie was a quick and willing pupil. Lydia's house began to look almost as it used to. Even Henry noticed. The last few times he'd gone over he hadn't stayed as long and on the way home he had muttered, "Damned place still looks like Lydia's house."

"Stephanie didn't know a thing about housekeeping," Edith said with satisfaction. "I've been helping her out."

Henry stared at her. "So, that's it," he said.

"And," Edith added, "I've been talking to Arthur about getting rid of the dogs."

Henry exploded. "He wouldn't!"

"Don't be silly, Henry, Lydia's house is noplace for animals."

"It is *not* Lydia's house!" Henry shouted.

"Oh, yes it is," Edith said calmly. "I told you Arthur would come to his senses. You must admit I was right."

That night Edith had a choking nightmare. She felt encased in a soft, solid, airless mass. She tried to move but couldn't. When it finally came to her that she wasn't dreaming and her mind faced the dizzying black tunnel, her body thrashed weakly from side to side and then she was still.

Henry met Arthur at the back fence the next morning. He had been spading up a new garden along the side of the garage and now he leaned on his spade, enjoying the warm sunlight and watching the dogs cavort in Arthur's yard. He smiled. "My goodness, don't they have a good time?"

Arthur spoke with a worried frown. "But they sure make a mess of the house and yard. Lydia would turn over in her grave."

Henry put his hand on his friend's arm where it rested on the fence. "I keep telling you, Art—it's no longer Lydia's house. And you know what?" He turned and pointed at his own grey-shingle Cape Cod and his eyes glittered. "That is no longer Edith's house."

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a *NEW* Jemima Shore story by

ANTONIA FRASER

Jemima Shore, Investigator, has come to Venice to research the first in a new series for Megalith Television. The series is to be titled "The British Honeymoon with . . ." and, coincidentally, the suite next to Jemima's at the Hotel Carpaccio is occupied by honeymooners. Or was, before Nadia Hewling went missing.

This story first appeared in England earlier this year in Woman's Own. *Antonia Fraser's new Jemima Shore novel,* Oxford Blood, *has just been published by Norton . . .*

THE GIRL WHO WANTED TO SEE VENICE

by ANTONIA FRASER

The furniture in the hotel suite was all on the grand scale: shades of turquoise, painted heavily with gold and upholstered in velvet. Above Jemima Shore's head twinkled an enormous chandelier made of glass drops, with one large central pear, and other swags of diamonds in frozen loops.

It was Venetian glass, presumably; for this was the Hotel Carpaccio, one of the most lavish (but not modern) hotels overlooking the Grand Canal. The flowers—and champagne—sent up by the manager to welcome Jemima Shore, Investigator, filming in Venice for Megalith Television, were equally imposing.

At this point Jemima, gazing at the manager's card, began to laugh. Admittedly, Megalith's current series had the overall title *The British Honeymoon with . . .*, Venice forming the subject of the first episode. But he had clearly got quite the wrong idea, for the card read: "To wish you all happiness in your married life." Jemima,

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being unmarried, was still smiling when there was a soft, persistent rapping on the door.

She imagined it to be one of the innumerable deft waiters who had given the Hotel Carpaccio its reputation for luxury and service. Instead she was confronted by a total stranger—a dark-haired, dark-eyed young man, very handsome in an Italian way, but definitely no waiter.

"Jemima Shore, Investigator?" he inquired in an anguished voice. "It's the police. You've got to persuade them for me. You see, it was all her idea. *She* wanted to see Venice."

"What on earth—?" began Jemima.

"I'm Harry Hewling," said the young man. He spoke as though the name explained everything. "I—we're in the next-door suite. I've seen you on your balcony. I recognized you. I—we're on our honeymoon."

"*Your* flowers! Of course!" cried Jemima. "Your wife must have them straightaway."

The young man gazed at her. "Don't you understand? Nadia—my wife—has disappeared. And the police seem to think I'm responsible." He looked down at the Italian newspapers, lying still untouched by the champagne bottle.

Even Jemima's fairly rudimentary Italian was sufficient to translate the glaring headlines:

WHERE IS SHE, THE VANISHED ENGLISH BRIDE?
IS SHE DEAD, THE BEAUTIFUL ENGLISH HEIRESS?

And for once the story now told by Harry Hewling to Jemima in a series of agitated confidences was certainly bizarre enough to justify such press attention.

Harry and Nadia Hewling had only just got married, in England, having known each other a bare month before that.

"But it was love at first sight," Harry insisted in his low desperate voice. "Love immediately. She was so fantastic. And the reason we got married quickly was because of Nadia's loneliness. She'd come from South Africa and her parents were dead. She was alone in the world."

"And rich?" contributed Jemima gently.

"Sure, she was rich!" exclaimed Harry. "Nadia happened to inherit a lot of money from a trust fund on her twenty-first birthday. Was that my fault? Sure, she paid for everything, including our honeymoon. Sure, I'm her husband and I stand to inherit if anything happens to her. Sure, she insisted on settling money on me on our

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marriage—she wanted to make us equal, she said. None of that makes any difference. I keep telling the police: I love her! And she wanted to see Venice."

"So you didn't marry her for her money?"

Harry Hewling hesitated, then impulsively took a crumpled photograph out of his pocket. Jemima stared at the slight, dark-haired girl feeding the pigeons in the Piazza, St. Mark's Byzantine façade in the background.

"Isn't she beautiful? Does a girl like that *need* two hundred thousand pounds to make you fall for her?"

"She's quite lovely." Jemima thought that together the Hewlings must have made a striking couple, with their regular dark good looks; had she known of their existence in the next-door suite, she might even have interviewed them for *The British Honeymoon* series. It would have been an amusing twist to interview a *real* English honeymoon couple for what was primarily a cultural investigation.

Jemima stared at the photograph. "You're quite alike, almost like brother and sister."

Harry Hewling smiled for the first time. "Everyone says that. Actually, I have got a sister, Gemma, but she's years older than me. She's my half sister, in fact. We're not close."

But Harry Hewling stopped smiling when he came to the subject of Nadia's disappearance. They'd had a terrific dinner—"We found this special restaurant in a funny little square off one of the small canals" —and then had walked back to the Carpaccio hand in hand. Up in their suite, Nadia had disappeared into the bedroom and shut the door. That didn't surprise Harry: she would probably reemerge modeling one of the satin-and-lace negligées she had bought for the honeymoon. Harry stood for a moment on their balcony looking out over the Grand Canal.

It was only after a while, when Nadia had not reappeared and the door was still closed, that Harry went into their bedroom. But the huge ornate room, with its double bed surmounted by a carved eagle, was empty. Harry investigated the marble bathroom. That, too, was empty.

Somewhat reluctantly, he telephoned down to the night porter. It was then that he had his first real surprise. Yes, the Signora Hewling had gone out and certainly without luggage.

And from that moment on, there had been no sight or sound of Nadia Hewling: no message, no telephone call—nothing. She had completely disappeared in Venice, wearing a summer dress and tak-

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ing with her nothing—nothing, that is, except her passport. In the haste of the wedding, they hadn't had time to change her original passport in her maiden name of Nadia Dansk; but, Harry said wanly, that had hardly seemed important at the time.

The hotel staff, quite politely, had indicated that there must have been a row and that the Signora would return. Honeymoons did not always go smoothly—even in Venice. At first the Italian police had taken the same line.

It was Harry Hewling himself who insisted that there had been no row, insisted they investigate Nadia's disappearance, treat her as a missing person. Now the financial circumstances of Nadia Dansk had come to light, via her English lawyers, and the police suddenly turned their attention to the bridegroom.

Everything began to count against Harry Hewling: the fact that he had been out of work before he met Nadia, the fact that she had given money over to him on marriage, the fact that he would inherit still further funds on her death. And yet in the absence of a body, no corpse having been dredged up from the Canal, no unknown body lying in the mortuary, it was difficult for the police to proceed further than interrogating Harry Hewling daily—and suggesting very firmly that he should not leave the city.

"In any case, I don't want to leave!" Harry told Jemima. "Supposing she comes back? She *must* come back." The airports had been checked—Venice airport first of all, then Milan and the other Italian airports; the railway stations similarly and the various frontiers of the country. No one traveling under the name of Dansk had departed. As for her description—well, a slight dark-haired girl in her twenties was a common enough sight in Italy at the height of the tourist season.

"And yet she took her passport," mused Jemima. "Why does a woman, a pretty young woman on her honeymoon with a wonderful trousseau, take her passport with her unless she intends to travel?"

Out of curiosity, or perhaps to give the distraught Harry Hewling the impression she could help him (which she doubted), Jemima allowed herself to be taken next door. She was shown the whole suite. It was, in fact, identical to her own, except for the rather macabre sight of Nadia Hewling's belongings still hanging in the ornately gilded cupboards, including the Janet Reger-style satin negligées. Then there were her shoes—lots of shiny new high-heeled sandals, totally unworn.

"What shoes was she wearing when she disappeared?" Jemima

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asked suddenly, her feminine curiosity aroused by this pathetic array of untouched splendor.

"I don't know," said Harry wretchedly. "I remember the dress very well because she was wearing it at dinner—turquoise blue, her favorite color. But the shoes—well, she had so many shoes, didn't she?" He pointed. "How can I remember which are missing?"

Jemima reflected that Nadia Hewling must have been very fond of them, for she'd worn the same ones throughout her entire sojourn in Venice. Or did all the beautiful new shoes pinch her?

The next day, Jemima found that Harry Hewling, in the nicest possible way, was clinging to her company, as though he was still somehow convinced that she would come up with a solution to his problems.

His grief and bafflement at his wife's disappearance was so constant and so evident that Jemima didn't like to turn him away from her side. She allowed him to accompany her when she went to the Piazza for a cup of coffee, even though she had craved a few days' solitude.

After a while Jemima began to have an uncomfortable feeling that Harry Hewling, for all his recent loss, was finding her increasingly attractive. Then Harry revealed, shyly, that he was an out-of-work actor—and matters became clearer. Presumably, he hoped that the magic of Jemima Shore would somehow help to secure him a job in television.

They sat outside Florian's, looking at the pigeons and the passers-by.

"All this," said Harry Hewling in a broken voice, waving his hand rather wildly in the direction of St. Mark's and the Campanile, "all this was what Nadia wanted to see so much. She wanted to see Venice. And she never did."

"Except for a very short time," corrected Jemima.

"*Too* short. Everything about our life together was too short." There was something about Harry Hewling's melodramatic turn of phrase that made Jemima wonder what kind of actor he was on stage.

Afterward, Jemima could hardly prevent Harry Hewling from walking back with her to the Hotel Carpaccio, although by this time a rather odd train of thought had started in her mind—a train of thought she really wanted to explore by herself without the benefit of the company of the attractive Harry Hewling—for attractive he

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undeniably was. Jemima could see how Nadia Dansk, alone in a strange country, might have fallen for him.

So Jemima was actually standing with Harry Hewling at the desk as they were asking for their keys when the hotel manager, Fulco Montevecchi, stepped forward and in his excellent English said: "Signor Hewling, would you come with me?"

The last Jemima saw of Harry Hewling was his back view disappearing, somewhat dwarfed by two rather burly visitors on either side of him. But Jemima was well able to hear Harry Hewling's next utterance, because it was in fact a scream—quite a piercing scream—followed by the noise of someone falling.

Jemima, in spite of an instinct which made her want to rush into the manager's office, was obliged to rein her curiosity and depart—rather slowly—up the grand hotel staircase.

Once in her rooms, however, she could hardly settle amid the turquoise and gilded grandeur, the profusion of the manager's scarlet gladioli in honor of a happy married life—which had somehow never been removed—without wondering what had now happened to Harry Hewling. Her curiosity was not gratified for some hours.

Then the figure of Harry Hewling, looking extremely pale and shaken, reappeared at the door of her suite.

"She's dead," he said in a blank voice. "Nadia, I mean. I can't believe it. They're saying she drowned herself. She must have gone back to England somehow and killed herself. I don't believe it. You know, I fainted when I heard the news. Her body has been in the sea all this time but they think it's her from dental records. But I suppose"—his voice broke—"I shall have to identify her. There's no one else."

"Your sister—your half sister, I mean?"

Harry Hewling looked at Jemima in some surprise.

"Oh, no. You see, Gemma never even met Nadia. She didn't even come to the wedding. I told you, we don't get on." By now he was openly crying. "Poor, poor Nadia. I shall *never* understand."

But Jemima Shore, with a chill feeling, thought that perhaps she *did* understand.

That instinct which nagged at her was telling her that she must go and talk to the detectives who had arrived from England. There must be some clue they could give her.

"Jemima," Harry Hewling was saying, "you will have dinner with me tonight? I suppose I'll have to go back tomorrow, but—well, I

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don't know how to put this, but I'd like to have one evening with you."

"This has all been a terrible shock," Jemima replied. "Why don't you go to your suite? And I'll be in touch with you later."

It was after a few rapid telephone calls involving the name Megalith Television and that of Jemima Shore, and the mention of little ways in which she had helped the police in the past, that Jemima tracked down her quarry.

An hour later she was having a drink in the Piazza once more, but this time at Quadri's on the opposite side of the square, with Detective Chief Inspector Ronnie Tree, one of the two detectives who had flown out from England to break the news of Nadia Hewling's death to her husband and accompany him back to England to identify the body.

"Thank you, Jemima; I'll have a Campari soda. Make that a double Campari soda," said the Inspector. "I loathe the stuff, mind you, but I've always wanted to see Venice and it's not worth coming all this way to drink beer, is it? Particularly as we've lost our man."

"Harry Hewling?" Jemima was drinking Italian white wine with a great deal more relish than the Inspector was displaying over his Campari.

"None other. A slippery customer. Oh, a pretty face and all that, I'll grant you he's good-looking—if you like the type, as obviously the late Mrs. Nadia Hewling did. But it's all too neat, much too neat. And now he's got away with it."

"Explain—"

"I'd better explain after I've finished this." The Inspector wrinkled his nose as he drained a huge red glass which looked, and evidently tasted to him, like medicine. "The things I do for England," he added. Looking grave, he continued: "We had it all worked out: bright young out-of-work actor meets up with shy South African heiress with no relations. He seduces her, marries her. She makes a will, leaving him everything and makes a settlement on him straightaway. The lawyer doesn't like it very much—*he* doesn't like Mr. Hewling's pretty face—but there's nothing he can do.

"Then the wife disappears on honeymoon in Venice, and the husband begins to scream blue murder. Well, it stands to reason there's something very fishy there, doesn't it? When she does turn up, she's dead. And that's where the trouble starts. Mrs. Hewling is dead as a doornail in the English sea, and Mr. Hewling is alive and well

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with an unbreakable alibi in the Hotel Carpaccio, Venice. What's more, everyone testifies that he'd been there all along, in constant touch with the police. No way he could have followed her and done it."

"There is a way it could have been done," said Jemima slowly. "I'm thinking about some unworn shoes—masses of shoes—and a photograph of a dark-haired girl feeding the pigeons in the Piazza."

Several hours later, Jemima Shore, having returned to her suite, received the call she was expecting. "Quite right, my dear, quite right," boomed the voice of Detective Chief Inspector Tree. He sounded remarkably jovial, considering the amount of Campari soda he had imbibed. "How did you guess? The name's Kenyon, by the way, and there's a theatrical background there, too. The Italian police will be coming to get him shortly. So how did you guess?"

"First of all, the disappearance of the passport," said Jemima. "The point was being made to us: Nadia Hewling was able to travel away from Venice because she had taken her passport. Yet there was no record of Nadia using the passport to go home. Then Harry Hewling impulsively showed me a photograph of a pretty girl—Nadia as he called her—to prove that he had not been fortune-hunting. I pricked his vanity.

"The first thing I noticed was that it was crumpled—quite old, in fact. Secondly, that it was taken in the Piazza. When I commented that they looked so alike Nadia might have been his sister, Harry told me very firmly that although he did have a sister she was much older and he hardly knew her. He made a point of it—just as later he insisted that the sister had never met Nadia."

"Gemma Kenyon," said Detective Chief Inspector Tree. "His half sister, and in fact a few years younger—another would-be actress and much the same facial type as the wife. She was in it up to the neck. She traveled out with Hewling on Nadia's own passport under the name of Dansk, then went home under her own—knowing it was extremely unlikely that anyone would remember her among the many dark-haired girls traveling at holiday time. She must have destroyed the Dansk passport en route."

"But it was the shoes," pursued Jemima, "which really made me suspicious—all those totally unused shoes from poor Nadia's trousseau. Gemma must have traveled to Venice and gone out to dinner and left the hotel all in the same pair. Shoes are very personal things. You can always trust a woman to look at shoes. Gemma

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could wear Nadia's clothes but not her shoes, which were too small. She presumably just brought one pair of her own and wore them all the time. So when Harry Hewling told me Nadia had never even seen the Piazza, forgetting that he'd rashly shown me that photograph, then—"

"Then Jemima Shore, Investigator, became most suspicious," concluded the Inspector. "Well, they did for her all right, the pair of them—did for her in the sea somehow and made sure that the body wouldn't be washed up for some time. And then went straight off to Venice to give him the alibi he needed. We're still working out the details."

About twenty minutes later, Jemima was standing on her balcony gazing at the great dome of Santa Maria della Salute across the Canal, listening to the evening bells and thinking that they were sounding their own kind of memorial to Nadia Hewling. Then she was aware that Harry Hewling had stepped out onto the balcony next door. He was looking at her.

"What are you thinking about, Jemima?" asked Harry. He was smiling. "Are you thinking about having dinner with me?"

"I am thinking about a girl who wanted to see Venice," responded Jemima in a peculiarly expressionless tone, which some at Megalith Television would have recognized as the "trap" interview voice she used when she wanted to avoid arousing the suspicions of her intended victim. "And never did see it, not even for one day—*not even for one day!*"

Harry's dark eyes met hers for one instant. For one instant the mask of the actor seemed to drop—the shy young man vanished to be replaced by some more rapacious kind of animal. He took a step forward, toward her.

Whatever Harry Hewling would have done, Jemima Shore would never know, for at that point she heard a loud knocking at the door of the next-door suite. Harry Hewling continued to look steadily at her.

"You know, you really shouldn't have tried to pick me up as well," said Jemima. Her voice was now openly hard and cold. "Otherwise, without a woman's instinct, who knows, you might have actually got away with it."

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a *NEW* Inspector Saito story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

This story about Crime Squad Inspector Saito Masanobu is the first of two new stories by Janwillem van de Wetering in this issue. Last year Mr. van de Wetering won France's coveted Grand Prix de Litterature Policiére for The Maine Massacre *(Houghton Mifflin in hardcover, Pocket Books in paperback), and earlier this year the first collection of his stories about Inspector Saito of the holy city of Kyoto,* Inspector Saito's Small Satori, *was published by Putnam. It is also a Detective Book Club selection.*

Janwillem van de Wetering's unusual, speculative fiction is informed by the quick wit and uncompromising honesty of the author, both qualities no doubt honed by his experiences as a member of Amsterdam's Special Constabulary and, later, his time spent in a Zen monastery in Japan . . .

THE JUGHEAD FILE

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

Text of a police file used as study material in a detective course at the Police Academy of Kyoto:

A report drawn up by Inspector Third Class Saito Masanobu, Crime Squad, Municipal Police, Kyoto

Kyoto, 20 April 1979

Alerted by a telephone call made by Kogawa Sujuru, I visited a house, 7–3–5 Kawabata, this morning at ten o'clock. At the house, on the second and upper story, in a room at the rear, I found the lifeless body of a woman, Washino Maiko, 64 years old. Dr. Obata's report, stating the cause of death and a description of the woman's

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remains, is attached. Several garbage bags, made of grey plastic, had been cut open and tacked to the paper sliding doors and windows in order to block the flow of air. I found a small gas cylinder in the room, of the type that will fuel a cookstove. The cylinder's faucet was open and its contents had escaped. Mrs. Washino lay on her bed on the straw floorboards. Her arms were crossed on her chest.

The only other inhabitant of the house, Kogawa Sujuru, a forty-year-old man, told me: "It must have happened during the night. I had been drinking last night and slept deeply. I live downstairs and always spread my bed in the lower front room. When I woke I smelled gas and saw that the small cylinder that feeds gas to the kitchen stove had been removed. I ran upstairs to call Mrs. Washino. She adopted me as her son five years ago and she owns this house. I opened the door to her bedroom but staggered back because of the gas escaping into the corridor. I saw her in her bed, covered my mouth and nose with a cloth, rushed in, and opened the windows. I then called the police. Mrs. Washino suffered from depressions and often talked about suicide."

Kogawa is an artist, a painter, self-employed. I interrogated him in his studio, the rear room on the lower floor. He said: "I feel guilty. Mrs. Washino has never married and is quite well off. People from the neighborhood call her 'Mrs.' but that isn't really correct. It was most kind of her to be willing to adopt this humble person, a struggling artist, as her son. Thanks to her, I no longer have to sell my drawings and paintings in the street. Since Mrs. Washino accepted me as her official son, she made me comfortable here and paid all my expenses. I have been unworthy of her many gifts. I should at least have tried to cheer her up. Now I inherit all her possessions and cannot repay her many favors."

As both circumstances and the doctor's findings indicate that Washino Maiko died voluntarily and by her own hand, I conclude suicide.

A report drawn up by Inspector First Class Saito Masanobu, Crime Squad, Municipal Police, Kyoto

Kyoto, 3 May 1983

Alerted by a telephone call made by Miss Ozaki Jumoko, I visited a house, 7–3–5 Kawabata, at nine-thirty this morning. Miss Ozaki, a charwoman employed by Kogawa Sujuru, the well known artist, took me to the lifeless body of the owner of the house. It hung from a beam in the studio, the room at the rear on the first floor. Dr.

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Obata's report, stating the cause of death and a description of Kogawa's remains, is attached. I also attach a lengthy letter I found pinned to the kimono the corpse was wearing. After having ascertained that the handwriting was the same as that on various documents found in the house, and in view of the doctor's report and the circumstances I observed, I conclude suicide.

Letter written by Kogawa Sujuru directed to Inspector Saito Masanobu

Kyoto, May 2, 1983

Friend and Devil who pursues me:

You will doubtless remember what I told you when you visited here on the occasion of my adopted mother's untimely and unnatural death. You suspected that I was lying. My lies were convincing enough as I had wrapped them around the truth. My adopted mother died, four years ago, because she choked on poisonous gas and you interrogated me at length. I saw that your ears stand out rather and therefore called you "jughead"—not aloud, of course. The physical flaw that makes you look rather comical impressed me deeply.

You wanted to learn the truth. Did you ever hear the Buddhist tale about the onion? I refer to the comparison here because before you asked me all your questions, you said that you subscribe to the Zen Sect of the Buddhist faith. You treated me politely, even with some kindness, perhaps out of habit but also, it seemed to me, to make me drop my defenses. I own a small statue of Bodhidharma, the first Zen master, who came from India a long time ago. You admired that impressive work of art. I said that I had been given the little sculpture depicting the fat, angry-looking patriarch by my father. My father had in turn received it from the Zen master, Gota, the recently deceased teacher who was in charge of the Northern Temple.

Gota often talked about the onion. When we peel an onion, one layer after another comes off until finally only emptiness is left—just as the Buddhist training gradually peels off the ego so that we can enter the great void. You wanted to peel my onion, tear off my lies that, as a scaly hull, cover up my truth. For even I, I dare to presume, have the divine core, the silence that we all share in the end.

You sat there so strongly and quietly, like a monk in deep meditation. You wore a dark western-style suit of good quality, tailor-made perhaps, a white shirt, and a narrow tie. You had folded your legs, your head stood straight on your shoulders, and your torso

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rested squarely on my poor wornout floor. I felt that you didn't believe any of my filthy fabrications, but I made them up anyway, so that you could write them into your report. The death of my stepmother was framed within those lies as a suicide that could not be disputed. I said I was sorry so that my innocence might be clear. Anyone who breaks the law is careful when the police face him in his own quarters. You were my enemy, a devil ready to drag me into hell.

A jugheaded devil?

A physical aberration increases the humanity of our appearance. I beg your pardon—I'm not saying that you're physically handicapped, like me. Did you mention in your report that I have a hunchback and squint terribly?

I don't think you did, although the information could be relevant. To what? To murder. Surely you noticed that my stepmother was hunchbacked, too, and squinted behind her thick glasses. Some people thought Mrs. Washino was my mother long before she officially adopted me. In reality, our similarities must be due to an interesting twist of fate.

Can I tell you something about my life? Even you, an intelligent and well trained police officer, may learn something about the way human relations come about.

My mother died shortly after my birth. My father was ashamed that his son was a crippled horror but he couldn't avoid raising his own child. He designed kimonos for a well known store here in town. After my mother's death, he got up early every morning and visited Zen master Gota. I think my father wanted to know what he had misdone in order to deserve a son like me. Surely my handicaps and my mother's untimely death are consequences of mistakes he had made in previous lives. Master Gota devised some riddles that my father was supposed to solve and advised lengthy meditations so that my father could reach his deeper mind.

My father always had little luck. Now he couldn't even rest after his long hours of work, for which he was never properly paid. I wonder now if master Gota's efforts were very helpful. He heaped more questions on my father's basic query: why does a well meaning man have to suffer in his everyday existence? Zen riddles make little sense—they can't be solved logically and tend to drive the disciple crazy.

Stop the express train from Osaka. Have you ever heard of that Zen riddle? Isn't it rather a cruel command? My father must have

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thought so, for one day he was found dead on the railroad track. I think he was waiting for Buddha, thinking maybe the Holy One would show himself as a train. The corpse was mangled but I recognized his remains as those of my father. I was fourteen years old then.

The stop-the-train riddle interested me profoundly. Half my being originates in my father's genes—I am the continuation of all of his inquiry. I burn incense in front of his photograph now, but it would be better if I could find an answer to his question.

Stop the train from Osaka. How often didn't I stand on the track on the spot where the hill rises and one can see the ancient Tojy Pagoda on one side and the modern Grand Hotel on the other, a symbol of western civilization that has moved us so far forward in time. Time—that has to be the answer to the riddle, time that doesn't exist, but my father wouldn't see that. He still believed that he had to hurry somewhere, but master Gota wanted him to stop himself. He didn't suggest that my father should try to flag down a rushing train.

Shouldn't Zen masters be equipped with some psychological insight? Are such lofty souls allowed to push the silly under a train? I think master Gota was sorry, for he sent his head monk to take me to the temple. For two years I was given board and lodging at the monastery, went to school during the days and spent the evenings with the monks in meditation. They made me get up early so that I could sit quietly in the mornings, too, and whenever I dozed off they beat me with a stick. Afterward I had to bow down to show my appreciation. Beating seems to be part of a proper education. There was an article in the paper the other day, praising the president of a company manufacturing luxury cars. He had beaten a student laborer with a wrench because the young fellow hadn't properly fastened a bolt.

The head monk was an aristocrat. Every time you visited me, you reminded me of him. You wore your tailor-made suit like he wore his robe. It's fashionable in the Zen temples to always wear the same robe, so that outside people can see how little money the monks are spending on themselves. When the fabric tears with age, the monks patch the holes. The head monk spent much time and trouble continuously repairing his robe, and it was a work of art, a most subtle combination of bits of cloth in all possible shades of blue and black. I often painted him, although he refused to model for me. Master Gota would say I wasted my time whenever he saw me busy with

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my brushes. He would confiscate my paintbox, but I got pocket money from the monks so that I could save up and keep replacing my supplies. When high school was over, I esaped from the temple and began to wander about. For many years I slept under bridges and tried to sell my work in the streets.

I was alone and hated everyone around me. Cripples learn how to hide their feelings, however. The other homeless bums abused me and kept stealing my money. I dreamed about revenge. Perhaps my hatred kept me alive in those days. Street-people die easily enough. They lie down somewhere, embrace themselves, sigh a few times, and die in their sleep. But I still needed life and was strengthened by my fury. I dreamed that I broke the posts that hold up the famous old buildings of our city or that I burned down City Hall. I exploded temples and caused huge holes in busy streets. In reality I behaved pretty well and made nice pictures, showing cute toddlers playing in gardens or darling kittens adorned with shiny bells dangling from velvet collars. The kittens were fat and happy, not at all like the starved creatures people dump in temple gardens thinking that Buddha will take care of them. Buddha never sees them, but the kittens' screams bother the monks, who drown them in the temple pond.

Did you grasp any of this when you stared into my squinting eyes, when you inquired how Mrs. Washino had met her end? I believe you did. I do squint rather badly, as you surely noticed. Passers-by often laugh at me. "Don't you get bored with the view of your own nose?" more than one has asked. The way your ears jut out amused me, too. I wanted to ask, "How is it you don't get blown away when the typhoon descends on the city?"

How did my stepmother and I meet? You asked me that and I supplied you with some of the required information. I said that I rented a room in the old lady's house and that she liked me more and more, and then took me to City Hall one day to have me inscribed as her lawful son.

As her son, I was her heir and her death would be of material benefit to me. So I manipulated her into death. Ungrateful, right? I am now allowed to fill in the remainder of the pertinent information?

I was showing my work in the streets and slept under a bridge, the Godjo Bridge it was at that time, by far the worst shelter the city offers—there are drafts even when the wind dies down and the rats are bigger and more aggressive than anywhere else. The bums

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are worse, too—drunken muggers and toothless old hags creaking with filth.

I had just started portraying the Buddhist holy men—Bodhidharma leering over his scraggly moustache, the ancient master Hakuin falling apart with age, the retarded Ananda, Buddha's first disciple, who always repeated his teacher's words and was therefore called Parrot. Tourists often come to Kyoto because they think that our temples emit a heavenly radiance and holy pictures make suitable souvenirs to bring or show the folks back home. One day I made a fair amount of money and couldn't resist the temptation to buy myself new clothes. I suddenly looked so neat that I didn't dare to go back to my bridge. I wandered about aimlessly until I saw a well kept house in an alley of the Eastern Quarter. There was a sign on the wall, *Room for Rent.*

That was the beginning of the big change. Mrs. Washino opened the door and permitted me to come in. I hadn't been in a proper home for so long that I felt ill at ease. I had to restrain myself for I wanted to grin—Mrs. Washino was hunchbacked, toothless and also squinted horribly. We couldn't look straight at each other and had to hang over somewhat to counterbalance the weight of our misshapen backs. The rent she offered was reasonable enough and I said I would take the room. She thought it was strange that I wanted to move in at once, but I had everything with me—my rags in a bag and my work in a wooden cylinder. I thought she might refuse and quickly counted out some notes. She nodded in acceptance. There's something indecently alluring about cash openly displayed.

I wasn't decent, either. Mrs. Washino often came to chat and would offer tea but I always insisted on drinking rice wine. Under the bridges I had become accustomed to alcohol. Fiery rice wine warms the bones and can be inspiring at times. I kept painting holy men and needed to be somewhat drunk in order to get their expressions right. But not too drunk. It was only later that I became really addicted.

Mrs. Washino liked to chatter, and her choice of subjects was rather monotonous. She usually discussed death and ways to die. She often watched TV stuff in which noble gentlemen and ladies of long ago get themselves into trouble and are forced to take their own lives. We would talk of various deadly poisons, knife and sword thrusts in belly or neck, swallowing broken glass, suffocation by hanging, jumping off cliffs, walking into the sea, and other methods. I suggested gas, for she kept gas in her home. I understood, of course,

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that she discussed her own death even as she forced all sorts of depressed friends and acquaintances she didn't have into her tales. She didn't know anyone at all.

I would paint until noon and spend the afternoons in the streets. One day she asked me how I made my money. I told her the truth and she shuffled out of the room without saying anything. She didn't even bow. Later that day she came back and accused me of shameless begging. She said I would have to go. I could stay until the end of the month, but not a day longer, for a person who squats on the pavement waiting for passers-by to hand out money was not the type of tenant who was welcome in a nice lady's home.

"If I'm not welcome, I won't stay a moment longer," I said curtly and began to pack my belongings. Mrs. Washino said she wasn't evicting me but she knew a shed where I could possibly stay. I left angrily and slept under the bridge again. The next day she found me in the street, selling near the Imperial Palace gates. She told me she had been looking for me for hours. She cried and apologized and so I moved in again.

She wasn't a bad woman, you will say, although she might possibly be a little proud and generally limited in her outlook. I agree, with some hesitation. Human motivations aren't always easy to grasp. We looked alike and she may have considered me to be her own continuation. Then again, perhaps she wanted to have me in her power or saw a chance to gain honor through me. I'm not an untalented artist. Haven't I proved my worth since then? My *Cranes on a Rainy Evening* won a prize last year and *Kyoto Art* regularly shows reproductions of my work, followed by lengthy articles in which the experts sing my praise. *Kyoto Art* is the best art magazine in the country, some say. Mrs. Washino would have been proud of me if she were still alive.

When I returned here from my night under the bridge, she and I had a long and serious conversation. I need pay no more rent if I promised not to sell my work in the streets any more. From that day on, she paid for my paint and brushes and brought me all my meals. I was to produce a fair number of paintings and find an agent who could introduce me to the galleries and arrange exhibitions. I did my best and within a year or so my work became known.

Can you imagine what it's like to be attached by a leash to an old woman's claw? Certainly I could paint under favorable conditions, but I had lost my free will. I fought back by drinking more than before and regularly invited other artists I'd met through my agent

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to help me empty the jug. I became quarrelsome and encouraged her when she got into her death talk again. Whenever I sold a painting I kept quiet, but I made sure that all my disappointments were fully discussed. The subject of suicide cropped up more and more often and I insisted on the providential use of gas.

The cylinder with cooking gas belongs in the kitchen but was found in her bedroom when you came to inquire about my stepmother's death. Who carried it up? She didn't ask me to lug that heavy object up the stairs, but one evening I thought the time had come, and was proved right.

Isn't it amazing how roles sometimes revert? At first she could control me at will but gradually I became the driving factor. My stepmother committed suicide. She unscrewed the faucet after she had pinned the plastic garbage bags on the frames of her doors and windows. I only carried the cylinder up. To assist in suicide is illegal, but hard to prove.

As her only heir I became a suspect, but the truth is that I didn't need what she left me. A week after Mrs. Washino's death, my first big exhibition opened and I knew that I would sell. My hunch wasn't unfounded. My name had been mentioned in the right circles for a while.

So why did I help her make up her mind? I think I did that to wipe out my own past. I wanted to be rid of the disgusting beggar I had been for so long, and Mrs. Washino was the only one who had known him well. Perhaps my misdeed was also caused by the dreams of revenge I experienced under the bridges. Had I finally found someone who was even weaker than me? Or did I long for the beautiful young women I couldn't bring into the house because my stepmother's possessive jealousy barred them from my life? Did I intend to free myself once and for all? Or was it her negative talk getting on my nerves too much?

It's hard to know oneself. You saw me as a potential murderer and kept coming back from time to time. Very clever of you. As a policeman, you certainly knew your duty. You couldn't prove my guilt, but you suspected that I wasn't quite done as yet and stayed in touch in order to prevent further upheavals. You wanted me to know that the State had her eye on me, isn't that right, Inspector? Isn't it your task to protect society? Or were you interested in my case, like Zen master Gota once was when he made me sit in his temple where the monks were beating me? Every one of your visits inflicted severe pain on my soul. Your soft polite voice hit me like

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a whip. Your gaze burned into the very depth of my being. You are a devil employed by the judges of hell. Doesn't Buddhism claim that only development matters and that pain is the best teacher? Isn't that truth so convincing that we enjoy reading in the paper that a student laborer in a motor-car factory has been beaten by his highest boss with a wrench?

I see you now, with your jugheaded face. If you had normal ears, you wouldn't have impressed me. Unblemished truth-bearers can dazzle us too much. Master Gota suffered from the disease of Parkinson and his trembling hand underlined everything he was trying to show me. Why does Bodhidharma's image fascinate me? Because that great teacher made use of a fat body and a grumpy face and because he slowed himself down by always displaying a nasty temper. The stylized Buddha images mean nothing to me. What do they display but inimitable perfection?

You haven't visited me for a while, but I know that you can drop in any minute now. Your visits were always unexpected and I was never able to prepare myself properly.

I assume that you will read this letter in my studio. Look about you, please. Do you see my latest work? The portraits of the ballet dancer Netsuku? Yes, that's right— on all my sketches the poor girl squints. Netsuku is known for her beautiful eyes that contemplate infinity with their luscious radiance, but in my portraits she shortsightedly peers at the tip of her nose. That failure made me buy the rope that will strangle me. I did keep trying for days on end, I've always been good at drawing eyes but I must have lost that ability for good. If you check my chest of drawers, you will find hundreds of scraps of paper on which I tried to depict Netsuku's eyes. What shows, as you will see, is my stepmother's unhappy squint.

The end of the road. Suicide is always inspired by despair. My father jumped against the thundering engine of the Osaka Express, Mrs. Washino opened up a faucet. I'll be kicking a stool in a minute. When one does that, there has been the choice of the only way out. I can only guess at what went on in the minds of my father and stepmother, and in my own mind the process is not too clear, either. Should I have confessed my crime? What would you have done? A confession alone does not stand up in court, but if together we had collected some proof my guilt could never have been washed away.

Do I realize now that I must punish myself by cutting short a most promising career? In a way I need to thank you, terrible devil who never gives in, for you destroyed my revenge. By visiting me

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from painful moment to moment you made me peel my own onion of ignorance. I'm not done yet—there are still tear-drawing skins that need to be ripped away, but does any process ever come to an end? Is the end of death no more than a new beginning? I will meet my stepmother again, in another form and under fresh circumstances, for if there was no connection between us, this present life has certainly tied us together.

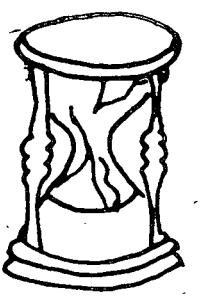
I hear the monks sing chant again when they began their morning's meditation and a new day:

I myself see where I failed before.

Is there no end to the greed, rage, folly that brought about my birth and determined the place of a fresh start?

I confess my ignorant mistakes now, so that I can keep moving forward.

You'll have to cut me loose, put me down, and write your report. I'm sorry I cause you trouble. Meanwhile, thank to you, I float away and am finally rid of your infernal but benificent meddling.



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a *NEW* Grijpstra–de Gier story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

Not only an unclear arrest but a hundred thousand guilders belonging to the prisoner gone from the wall safe in the commissaris' office, the only keys to which belonged to the commissaris (away at a health spa in Bad Gastein), Adjutant Goldsma (on holiday in the North), Inspector Halba (whose wife said he was working on a secret assignment and wasn't expected home for another few days), and Grijpstra and de Gier, who had made the arrest in the first place and *put the money in the safe . . .*

FIVE KEYS

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

The subject wasn't all that suspect and it wasn't clear to the sergeant why the arrest had to be made. So he watched while the adjutant worked. "Just a moment," the adjutant had said, "I'll be right back." The detectives' vehicle had gotten itself stuck in the St. Lucius Alley where, as is not uncustomary in Amsterdam, a van ahead had suddenly parked and was now being unloaded.

The two investigators were just sitting there when the subject appeared, dressed in an old aviator's leather windbreaker and faded jeans—an old-fashioned man with the long hair of a previous generation, a drooping moustache and nervous small eyes. The adjutant didn't think much more about it. An uneventful evening, the extra irritation of the endlessly unloading van in a narrow one-way alley, the dirty long hair and the shifty eyes, it all added up. Wasn't the adjutant being paid by the city to keep an eye on Those Who Mean Harm? The suspect meant harm.

"Police," Adjutant Grijpstra said. "See?"

The man was a professional, too, be it on the other side of the law.

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He understood what the officer was making clear. While he read the plastic identification, held steady in front of his face, he invitingly lifted his arms.

"Have a feel," he said pleasantly.

The adjutant's fingers poked.

"Ah." That was a small transparent plastic envelope. "Ah." That was a thick bundle of banknotes.

"Come with us," the adjutant said triumphantly, "and no fun or games now. You won't like my handcuffs, they might hurt your wrists."

He led the man to the back seat of the old dented Volkswagen. The alley was still blocked by the van. A car behind the Volkswagen hooted impatiently.

The man laughed—not too cheerfully for he was a prisoner now, hopelessly caught in the vehicle's doorless rear compartment. Then he began to mutter to himself. "Just walking along on my innocent way and what happens, hey?"

"What's in the envelope?" Sergeant de Gier asked.

"Heroin."

"Well well well."

"Half a gram," the man said. "For my own use only. No reason for your fat friend to make the arrest. That's illegal, you know. Depriving a citizen of his rightful freedom? Your fat friend has got himself into trouble."

"And how much money do I have here?" Adjutant Grijpstra asked.

"A hundred thousand," the man said softly. "More than you two earn in a year. It's mine. Give it back."

"I'm not fat," Grijpstra said. "I'm solid."

"Try the Zero Method," the man said. "It worked on my dad. All the fat melted off. He had to be locked up in hospital, of course. There's never been any discipline in our family much. Pitiful, don't you think? To be chained to your bed in order to lose some weight?"

The van moved off and the Volkswagen followed.

The man was locked into a cell at Headquarters.

"Don't do this to me," the man said from behind his bars. "I keep telling you, the arrest is illegal. My attorney will be in touch with you. Are you out of your bleeps? Since when can you jail a free citizen in the most democratic city of our great country because he happens to carry some cash and a negligible quantity of a most helpful drug?"

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"Isn't our guest right?" Sergeant de Gier asked five minutes later in Headquarters' canteen. "Why do you define the subject as suspect?" He was arranging his thick gleaming curls and adjusting the silk scarf, artfully folded, into his tailormade shirt. He checked his image in a mirroring window.

"Aren't you handsome," Grijpstra said. "And intelligent—that, too. Wasn't our man about in the worst part of the Red Quarter, and aren't you aware that he fits the profile of the worst type of dealer? He carries no ID and we do not have to believe that his name is Jan Jansen. The law tells us that we may arrest a subject if we can reasonably assume that he gave us a false name. If such an individual is apprehended at night we may hold him until eleven A.M. the next day. Tomorrow, when I'm rested, washed, and well fed, I will interrogate him at length. Right now I'm going home."

"After you've placed the money in a safe place," de Gier said. "Or do you want to count it at home in bed?"

Grijpstra pushed his cup away. "True. Come with me. You can lock the safe once I'm done."

The safe, a simple cast-iron box, locked with an old rusty key, had been hidden in the wall of the commissaris' private office. As the commissaris' chief assistant, Grijpstra, like de Gier, held a key to the office. The safe was covered up with a portrait in oils of a Seventeenth Century captain of the guard, a jolly gent in a brocade jacket, who grinned pleasantly as he was hung back on his hook.

"A hundred thousand," Grijpstra said, "if you please. The value of a thousand stolen bikes, or car radios, or the sum total of several weeks of cowardly mugging, handed to suspect in return for a filthy drug. Aren't we doing good work these days? The cash will be confiscated and used to pay for the continuation of our quest. The merry-go-round, Sergeant, will keep turning as long as you and I are around."

The safe squeaked as he turned the key.

"Did you give Jan Jansen a receipt?"

"I will, Sergeant," Grijpstra said. "I've never been known for bending our rules."

"I don't know," de Gier said as he walked Grijpstra home later on, "or rather, I do know. I know that I respectfully disagree."

"With me?" Grijpstra asked, fumbling with his house key. "Care to come in? A drink maybe?"

"No, thanks," de Gier said. "Yes, I think I disagree. You're short

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of a serious indication of guilt. The superiors will tell you so in the morning. Subject just walked about. Subject carried just a little bit of the silly-way-out. And cash, of course. Cash is okay."

"He isn't a dealer?"

"Possibly." De Gier nodded. "Very likely. Shoot him in the back, I say. Throw the vermin into the canal. Good riddance to the bastard." He smiled. "But we don't do that, you know."

De Gier wished Grijpstra a good night. He thought in the streetcar home. He shook his head while he thought. He mumbled to himself. "We have these rules," he mumbled. "Refined rules. For the benefit of all. Me, I would prefer to shoot him."

He got off and walked to his apartment through the park. He stopped to watch a duck floating on a pond. "But I won't shoot him," he told the duck. He thought of roasted duck, garnished with orange slices. He smiled at the duck. "I won't shoot you, either."

The duck quacked sleepily, unruffled a feather, and slowly paddled off.

The next morning the suspect's identity was confirmed. He was indeed Jan Jansen. He was listed in the phonebook. De Gier dialed and spoke to suspect's girl friend, who said Jan hadn't been home all night. He told her not to worry. Was Jan a working man? He was not. The couple had been living on welfare checks for the last few years. "Keep him a while," the girl friend said.

"So?" Grijpstra asked Jan Jansen. "Where did you get the hundred thousand?"

"Why should I tell you? I don't have to tell you." Jansen's smile showed perfectly restored teeth. He cut the smile. "Now release me at once." He felt his unshaven chin. "Lack of proof. And return the money."

Grijpstra pointed his cigar at Sergeant de Gier. "You have a key to the safe. Would you mind retrieving the cash?" De Gier went off. The adjutant and ex-suspect waited. Grijpstra smoked the cigar, Jansen looked out of the window.

"What happened to the sergeant?" Jansen asked after a while.

The telephone rang.

"The money has disappeared," de Gier's voice whispered through the phone. Grijpstra grunted. "No money," de Gier whispered. Grijpstra replaced the receiver. "You wait here," he told Jansen. "I'll be right with you."

"My money?" the former suspect asked.

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"Tell you what," Grijpstra said. "You go home. Come back before noon. The money is with the administration and I have to fill in forms."

Jansen snarled, "I have the receipt. If I don't get my money, I'll make bad trouble."

Grijpstra sighed. "Let's say five this afternoon. Our administration is slow. It may take me a while. I don't want you to waste your time."

"You're joking, of course," Grijpstra told de Gier. "I put the cash into that box last night. You watched me. One hundred thousand-guilder notes, counted in your presence. Held together by a red elastic band. Remember?"

"It's stolen, Adjutant."

"And the envelope with the heroin?"

De Gier pointed at the open box. "There."

There was a knock on the door. A young woman came in, carrying a duster and a broom.

"Morning, Miss Antoinette," adjutant and sergeant said.

"What are you doing here?" Miss Antoinette asked. "I'm trying to keep this place clean and you two keep messing it up again. Out of the way with you at once. The commissaris will be back tomorrow. He'll have enjoyed his holiday and expect to find a clean office. I have to water the plants, too, and if you don't leave right now I'll pour some cold water down your necks."

De Gier closed the box, replaced it, and rehung the portrait of the benevolent antique captain of the guard. Grijpstra frowned.

"Now what?" Miss Antoinette asked. "Get out of here. You're in my way."

The adjutant took a deep breath.

"Whoa," de Gier said gently. He smiled at the woman. "Really, Miss Antoinette, you're so nice-looking. What's with you today? We're trying to work and you barge in and yell. Why aren't you in the canteen having coffee with the other ladies?" He checked his watch. "You're not due here until nine."

Miss Antoinette dropped her cleaning tools and pushed her fists against her firm hips. She stretched her slender back and made her bosom press against the cotton suspenders of her tight jeans. Her large blue eyes sparkled with enthusiastic fury. "Someone has to work here. I came early because I plan to do an especially good job. Now will you leave or do I whip you with my broom?"

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"Miss Antoinette," Grijpstra said, "try to be helpful for a change. We're short a hundred thousand guilders. Would you perhaps know what may have happened to the bundle? It was placed in the safe. I put it there myself last night. The sergeant was my witness."

"What?"

Miss Antoinette sat on the chair reserved for important visitors wanting to consult the commissaris. She crossed her long legs. "Are you telling me that here, at Municipal Police Headquarters, a hundred supernotes have *disappeared?*"

"Cash that belongs to a private citizen," Grijpstra said. "The fellow will be back at five today. If the cash hasn't turned up by then, we'll have to borrow the money from the chief constable, make out a report, and inform the special sleuths who supervise the police. Oh, no. *Oh, no.*"

Miss Antoinette giggled.

"Something funny?" de Gier asked.

"Ha ha," Miss Antoinette said. "Aren't you two always chosen to investigate the most serious crimes? Well, what are you waiting for? Shouldn't you dive into this yourselves?"

"Ha ha," de Gier said. "Why don't you get us some coffee?"

Miss Antoinette raised her luscious body and made it sway through the open door. De Gier watched her go. "Isn't she beautiful?" he asked Grijpstra. "For month[illegible] I've been trying to interest her in my presence. There's been no impa[illegible]far. Why doesn't she give in? Are my intentions doubted? I merely try to [illegible]rmth."

"You do realize what's going on here," Grijpstra said. "You ca[illegible] be as stupid as all that, Sergeant. Will you ever make an attempt to apply yourself seriously to a task in hand? Is the police allowed to steal?"

"Warmth," de Gier said. "And not just physical warmth. I'm referring to love. What else is there that really matters? Whatever else we do is doomed from the start. The older I become, the more I believe it. Stop worrying about illusions, Adjutant, money is no more than printed paper. Whether it is around or not isn't of any real importance at all. They print money at some bank." He stared at the door. "Let me think about Miss Antoinette instead. All I want to do is adore her a little. Help her in and out of her coat. Carry her bag. Pick her up and carry her across puddles. She thinks I want to own her but I don't."

"Bah," Grijpstra said.

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De Gier turned. "Nothing bah about Miss Antoinette. A perfect example of the female divinity that I cherish and serve."

Miss Antoinette brought three plastic cups neatly arranged on a tray. "Here you are. Now tell me what happened. Did either of you grab the cash or not? If you—" she pointed at Grijpstra "—placed the money in the safe and if you—" she pointed at de Gier "—saw that happen, then you—" she kept pointing at de Gier "—should now be arrested."

"Why me?" de Gier asked. "I've never particularly cared about money."

"You're a loose male," Miss Antoinette said, "aging fast. All I ever see you do is wag your tail at women. In order to make real contact, you now probably feel you need to spend a lot."

De Gier thought.

"You—" Miss Antoinette pointed at Grijpstra again "—are another loose male. You have left your wife and are looking around again. So you want to buy a sportscar and tailormade clothes that'll hide all that fat."

"I'm not fat," Grijpstra said, "and I'm going to try the Zero Method."

"How about Adjutant Goldsma?" de Gier asked. "He also has a key to the safe, and there's the commissaris himself, and Inspector Halba. There are five keys in all."

"And two of them are yours," Miss Antoinette said. "The commissaris is in Austria. I haven't seen Goldsma in a while and Halba is off duty."

"The commissaris," Grijpstra said, "is soaking his sinful bones in Bad Gastein—that's far from here. Goldsma is on holiday on an island in the North. Halba is supposedly ready to report for duty tomorrow." He looked at de Gier. "Are you quite sure you didn't return here last night, because you had forgotten something again, and sort of absent-mindedly—?"

"I went home," de Gier said. "I took a streetcar, then I walked through the park, spoke to a duck, later fed my cat, and fell asleep over a book."

"You haven't been too serious lately," Grijpstra said. "You joke a lot. Is this another joke?"

"*You* did it," Miss Antoinette said to de Gier. "Enough of this now. Hand over the money." She looked at her watch. "It's nine sharp and I have to clean this room. I'm sure you can find something to

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do, too. Go and court Constable Jane. She's been crying over you in the radio room. Such a nice girl and you don't pay her any attention. If you start a flirtation, you should see it through. I don't like you, Sergeant, now get the hell out of here."

"Miss Antoinette," de Gier said softly. "Do like me a little. Go out with me tonight. How about having a Chinese meal and then listening to Bach in the Concertgebouw? We can have coffee afterward in an elegant café. That'll be it. I'll walk you home and go my way."

"Ha," Miss Antoinette said.

"Come with me, Sergeant," the adjutant barked.

They telephoned from their own office. The commissaris was in a medicinal bath and his wife promised that he would call back soonest. The rural police in charge of the island in the North said they would locate Adjutant Goldsma on the camping at once. Mrs. Halba said she hadn't seen her husband for several days and nights, that he was working on a secret assignment and she didn't expect him home for another few days.

"Inspector Halba is on ordinary leave," Grijpstra told de Gier. "He has been lying to his wife. He told *me* that he would be fishing somewhere. That marriage is ready to go on the rocks. The inspector is unfaithful."

"Out on the tiles," de Gier sa[illegible] tiles? You have any idea?"

"Spending a hundred thousand guilde[illegible]"

"Of course not," de Gier said. "An officer an[illegible] gentleman? Sneaking in here to rob our official safe? The inspe[illegible] is committed to the superior cause. Swore all sorts of stuff, hand o[illegible]he Bible under a portrait of the queen. Beyond any suspicion, Adju[illegible]nt. How can we even think this way?"

They grinned at each other, until the telephone rang.

"Yes?" the commissaris asked.

Grijpstra told him.

"It couldn't have happened," the commissaris said. "But if it did, it's a touchy business. Make sure you arrange matters satisfactorily at once. It'll be in the papers and there has been enough internal trouble publicized so far. Before five P.M. I expect that money to be where it belongs."

"Could anyone be using your key, sir?" Grijpstra asked.

Something rattled in the phone. "My key ring," the commissaris said. "I'm open to criticism but I do take care of my keys. I keep them in my pocket."

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"Sir?" Grijpstra asked.

"Good luck." The telephone clicked.

The phone rang again.

"Goldsma here."

Grijpstra explained.

"I never," Goldsma said. "But that's terrible, colleague. Can't you be a little more careful? Can't I ever leave the building? I haven't been away three days and our own safe is emptied out. Aren't you a fine pair of clodhoppers, you and the sergeant? Well, don't worry. I'll take the next ferry to the mainland. I'll solve the crime. Leave this to me."

"Stay where you are," Grijpstra said. "I'm sorry we had to bother you. We can do this ourselves. If we have to deal with you, too, we'll be slowed down too much. Where do you keep your keys?"

"At home," Goldsma said. "Hidden, with my pistol. Nobody can get at my keys. My own wife doesn't know where they are. And the house is empty—she and the kids are here."

"Goldsma is a fool," de Gier said when Grijpstra hung up. "He never knows where he keeps his stuff. Only last week he left his pistol on the counter. Took it off because it was hurting him. Left it where any suspect could reach it. It could have cost me my life. I was interrogating a dizzy junkie and the fellow kept doing something under the table. He had got hold of the gun and was looking for the safety catch. He didn't know that the new Walther is always ready to fire. The idiot could have shot me."

"Goldsma," Grijpstra said, "is too inept to grab such a lot of loot. I prefer to consider Inspector Halba. Maybe he's more intelligent. He's an officer, after all."

"Weak of character," de Gier said. "Whenever I beat him at judo, he talks about how tired he is and how hard he has to work. I work hard, too."

"You don't work hard," Grijpstra said.

A turnkey came in.

"What can we do for you?" Grijpstra asked.

"Would you know where I could find Inspector Halba?"

"He's off duty," de Gier said.

The turnkey produced a form. "Would you mind signing this for me?"

Grijpstra read the form. "Why should I sign this? Who is this prisoner? I've never heard of an Alicia Gonzales."

"A Colombian," the turnkey said. "Arrested because she was steal-

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ing from hotel rooms. She's an illegal immigrant who will be flown back to South America next week. Inspector Halba had her released for some special investigation. She should be back by now. Sign the form, Adjutant—my administration should be in order."

Grijpstra refused. The turnkey went back to the cells.

"Our inspector necessitates a pretty foreign lady for a private investigation?" de Gier asked.

Grijpstra left the room. He was back within minutes. "Just as I thought, the computer says that the suspect will not go to court. She's addicted to heroin and it will be easier to get rid of her soonest. I saw the photograph. She looks pretty nice."

"What would you be thinking?" de Gier asked.

Grijpstra nodded.

"Disgusting," de Gier said. "Abuse of power. Do we follow up on it?"

"I don't want to slander a colleague," Grijpstra said, "but between you and me—"

"Yes yes yes?" de Gier asked.

"No," Grijpstra said. "I never know anything, but you seem to hear a lot. This is a bad spot—we better get out of it or they'll be suspecting *us*. Go on."

"Go on with what?"

"What do you know about Inspector Halba?"

"Right," said de Gier. "I do go to pubs every once in a while, and sometime last week I ran into Sergeant XYZ. A secret-service type. Undercover chap."

Grijpstra drummed his fingers on his desk.

"The sort of fellow who'll never identify himself. Never makes an arrest. Sneaky." De Gier looked unhappy.

"Yes?" Grijpstra said.

De Gier rolled a cigarette. "So I say, 'Hello,' and XYZ, a colleague in a way, who owes me a favor, told me about this BMW." De Gier lit the cigarette. Grijpstra thumped his desk. "A super BMW, confiscated," de Gier said, "but somehow missing from our garage. XYZ knew the car. Belonged to a pimp who's big in cocaine. Follow?"

"Yes, dear." Grijpstra peeled a cigar out of cellophane. "I'm right with you."

"And my friend sees this BMW driving about with Halba at the wheel and a nice-looking lady next to him. So he follows the car out of curiosity. They're very curious, you know, the sneaky types."

"Very curious," Grijpstra agreed.

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"And the BMW got parked near a hotel, at a lakeside in the country. Not far from here."

"Let's go," Grijpstra said.

"Just a minute," the clerk behind the hotel counter said. "Could I see those identifications again, please?"

He studied the plastic cards. "Municipal Police? Amsterdam?"

"That's right," Grijpstra said. "Murder Brigade."

The clerk smiled politely. "No murders here, Adjutant. Would you have a warrant? This is the country—you're far away from home."

De Gier moved away from the counter. The clerk held up a hand. "Sorry, Sergeant. The gentleman and his girl friend haven't got up as yet. Our guest left orders not to be disturbed. If you can't produce a warrant, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave."

"Use the phone?" Grijpstra asked. "Can I look at your directory?"

The rural police phone was answered by a lieutenant who said he would be over in five minutes.

"It's fine by me," the lieutenant told the clerk.

De Gier pounded on the door indicated by the reluctant clerk. The door opened a little. Inspector Halba's eyes peered at the sergeant. "What's this?" Halba asked gruffly. "I'm not on duty. Go away, de Gier."

Grijpstra leaned against the door. De Gier leaned, too. Halba stepped back.

"Sorry, sir," Grijpstra said.

"Buenos dias," de Gier said to the girl sitting up in the bed, pulling up a sheet.

Grijpstra sighed. "With all due respect, sir, this isn't right. The señorita should be in her cell. Why did you take her here?"

Inspector Halba wrapped himself in a towel. "Why do you think?"

"Your wife said you're working on a secret assignment," de Gier offered.

The inspector shook his head. "You shouldn't pry into my affairs."

"We needed to speak to you, sir."

The inspector frowned. "Very well. So now you know. We all cut corners. Keep mum about this and I'll be very quiet when something crops up that might illuminate either of you two. You understand, don't you? The señorita is not unattractive and I thought it was a pity if she got mouldy in her cell. As she will be extradited in a few days, anyway, nobody will mind."

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"Wah," the lieutenant said. "Do you mind if I go? I'm having trouble breathing." He marched off, saluting at the door.

"We might as well go, too," Grijpstra said. "By the way, sir, would you have stopped at Headquarters last night?"

"Whatever for?" Halba sat on the bed. "Wasn't I more profitably engaged right here?"

"The lady is hooked," Grijpstra said. "Were you providing her with the necessary relief?"

Halba nodded. "We do confiscate heroin from time to time. I happened to have a little. It would be a pity to have it burned at the lab."

"Now," de Gier said, "let's suppose you ran out of it. There's usually a little in the commissaris' safe. Let's say you picked it up."

Halba shook his head.

"And while you were at Headquarters," Grijpstra said, "looking into the safe, helping yourself to some heroin, you happened to see a hundred thousand guilders. Maybe you took that, too."

"It might be easier for everybody around," de Gier said, "to return that money now. If you don't, there might be trouble."

Halba whistled.

"Yes?" Grijpstra asked.

Halba touched his nose. "Not me. I was here all the time, busy."

De Gier sat on the bed, too, smiling at the girl. The girl inclined her head. She also shrugged her shoulders.

"Not me," Halba said more firmly. "I'll be returning the señorita later in the day. You two better find that cash. Do anything you can think of to keep this quiet. He rubbed out his cigarette and got up. "Now, if you please." He pointed at the door. "Good hunting, colleagues."

"Now now now," de Gier said in the car. "You're hurting my ears. I didn't know you knew those words. Don't disappoint me. I set you as my glorious example."

"———," Grijpstra said.

"How about being logical?" de Gier asked. "Our inspector is what you just said he is, but he never touched that cash."

"And why not?" Grijpstra asked.

"He's bad, but he isn't crazy," de Gier said. "We'll have to sound the alarm at five today, and once we do he'll be dragged into the investigation. On the wrong side, too. He'll be suspended and probably tried. We can produce a rural lieutenant as a witness. The

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rurals aren't corrupt so far. If Halba had stolen the money he would have returned it—you see that, don't you?"

Grijpstra mumbled.

"I'm hungry," de Gier said. "Let's have a bite of lunch." He parked the car.

Grijpstra drank three cups of coffee while de Gier ordered the special twice.

"How can you?" Grijpstra asked. "Just watching you turns my stomach. *Now* what do we do?"

"Hello, Miss Antoinette," de Gier said in the corridor.

"Are you spying on me again?" the woman asked shrilly.

"I don't know," the sergeant said, "what you could possibly have against me. I *never* spy on you. I only look at you with admiration. Just the way you walk makes me catch my breath."

She turned toward him abruptly. "I won't go out with you. If you bother me again I'll put in a complaint."

De Gier watched her walk away. He tried the door of the commissaris' room. It was locked. He found his key. He checked the safe. The money still wasn't there.

The sergeant hid under the commissaris' desk. At five to five he heard the door open. He slid from under the desk. "Boo!"

Miss Antoinette shrieked. One hand was pressed against her breast.

De Gier put out his hand. "Could I have the money now? I'm in a bit of a hurry. The owner should be waiting in our office by now."

Miss Antoinette clicked her bag open and handed over the thick bundle. She seemed to have difficulty breathing. "How did you know?"

"No time," de Gier said. "I'll explain later. I'll pick you up at six-thirty. Just tell me where."

Jan Jansen stood in front of Grijpstra's desk. His hand was out. Grijpstra looked at the ceiling. "Okay," Jansen said, "I'm asking you for the last time. If you won't give me the cash, I'll be talking to your chief."

"Hello," de Gier said, entering at a fast pace.

"I don't really mind this," Jan Jansen said. "I'll get the money anyway and you two will be in no end of trouble. Another two detectives suspended. My life will be easier. Yep. Maybe this is all to the good."

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"Here you are," de Gier said. "Can I have the receipt?"

Jansen pocketed the notes. "Why did it take so long?"

De Gier shrugged. "Sorry. Administration. Always very slow. I had to stand in line. You're lucky you didn't have to wait till tomorrow."

"Ah," Jan Jansen said.

"You're better off than us," de Gier said. "There's no bureaucracy in crime. Would you mind leaving now? We still have some work to do."

Jan Jansen looked from one to the other and left in silence.

"How?" Grijpstra asked.

"Simple," de Gier told him. "Miss Antoinette had to have a key. She cleans the safe, too. Very good at her job. When she dusted the box, the money was in her way so she put it aside for the moment, behind a potted plant. Then forgot all about it, of course. Fortunately, she remembered when I asked her just now."

"De Gier," Grijpstra said. "Please."

"True," the sergeant said, swiveling in his chair. "You have no idea how diligent our cleaning ladies are. It irritated her that the safe was never dusted. Maybe we should blame Adjutant Goldsma for the oversight. He must have left his keys about and Miss Antoinette must have had them copied. Ever since then, she dusted the safe daily."

"Grijpstra?" de Gier asked.

Grijpstra's mouth snapped shut.

"I thought you were yawning," de Gier said, "but it lasted too long."

Grijpstra sat up. "That nice Miss Antoinette? Listen here, that silly young woman is a beauty. Out of place here. She probably hates us all. I hear she's divorced. She must identify us with her ex-husband. So she steals the money, to embarrass us. Okay. Why did she give it back?"

"Don't always look for the lowest motive," de Gier said. "I've got to go now. Shower and shave. Change and all that. Much to do. Goodbye."

It was eleven-thirty that night. De Gier and Miss Antoinette faced each other in a café.

She sipped her coffee, eyeing him over the rim of her cup. "Maybe I like you, after all. Forget the Miss. Call me Toine from now on. Would you like to hold my hand?"

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"You're divorced, aren't you?" de Gier asked.

"You wouldn't hold my hand if I was properly married?"

De Gier's curls shook.

"I live alone," Toine said, reaching out for his hand. "I like your hair. Thick curls like that turn me on, I think."

De Gier gently squeezed her hand.

She waved at the waiter. "Two cognacs, and the check is for me."

"Toine," de Gier said, "you had that key copied."

She smiled. "What if I did? That cluttery Goldsma kept leaving them on his desk. Then he went out for the day. There's a keysmith around the corner."

"Because," de Gier said, "you knew that we sometimes keep a lot of money in that safe."

"Yes." She nibbled a nail of her free hand. "I meant to leave the country. I'm half French. You wouldn't have found me. I thought I could start a café somewhere in Provence."

"But you returned the loot."

"I don't mind stealing," Toine said. "Not if it is a lot. To rob the police is like robbing some greedy bank. Or the State. The State is silly, too. I always wanted to steal a hundred thousand." The waiter put down the glasses. "Thank you." She raised her glass. "Do you believe in serving the State? Paying taxes so that bums can go on welfare?"

De Gier coughed nervously.

"You don't," Toine said. "It's crazy. Even on my wages, the administration deducts thirty percent tax. They steal from me, so I took it back."

"Your health," de Gier said.

They drank.

"Why did you bring it in again?" De Gier caressed her hand. "Won't you tell me? That's the part that bothers me."

"Because," Toine said, "I didn't want to make the commissaris unhappy. He's a nice little old gent. First I imagined that he wouldn't mind maybe, because he's still in Austria and couldn't be blamed, but then I thought that he wouldn't like his brigade to be up for laughs." She sighed. "I was so happy this morning. I had done it at last. And then I was more miserable than ever. I kept going back to the room and finally made up my mind to put the money back."

"What about us?" de Gier asked. "Grijpstra is a nice old guy, too."

She looked grim. "He left his wife."

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"She left him," de Gier said. "She gets most of his wages. She's staying with her sister. She has a good time."

"I didn't care about you, either," Toine said.

"And Inspector Halba?"

She pushed his hand away. "Halba? Do you know that he gets junkies out of their cells and abuses them in some country hotel?"

"Amazing," de Gier said. "I better check on that some time."

"And you!" she said softly. "What about you, eh, glamorous Sergeant? You're after all of us. Poor Jane in the radio room!"

"Listen," de Gier said. "Jane wants to marry me. I don't want to marry anyone at all. One day I'll sail a boat out to New Guinea. That's ten thousand miles away. There are cannibals and fifty-pound coconuts that fall from trees. If I ever make it out there, I still won't settle down." He whispered fiercely. "I want to swim with sharks. I'll fly an ultra-light aircraft. There are valleys there where nobody has ever been."

Toine shivered.

"See?" de Gier asked. "I'm immature."

She pushed a moist lower lip. "So what do you want with me?"

His voice was gentle again. "I want to adore you."

"I know what *that* means."

De Gier scratched his buttock.

Toine laughed. "Jane was right. She says you always do that when a woman gives in." She patted his hand. "Are you nervous now?"

"Me?" de Gier asked.

"Not tonight," Toine said.

He walked her home.

She kissed him at the door. "Care to come tomorrow for dinner? I'll cook Japanese."

Grijpstra was invited, too, but he had to leave early, after washing the dishes. De Gier dried. "Why don't you stay a while?" Toine touched the adjutant's arm. "I still have some saké. I'll warm it up."

No, Grijpstra really had to go.

"Why was he winking at you?" Toine asked after she let Grijpstra out.

"Was he?" De Gier scratched his buttock. "I didn't notice."

"I'll seduce you now," Toine said. "Do you mind?"

De Gier said he didn't.

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a *NEW* short story by

MARY AMLAW

"Mort's turned real unfriendly since he met that cute widow from Carolina," Annie warned Caleb. "I'd get out of those berries before he catches you."

Caleb went on picking berries in his stolid way, the July sun falling thick as salve over his thick body. "Berries is ours . . ."

GOOD NEIGHBORS

by MARY AMLAW

I know trouble when I see it in the making, and Caleb Daniels picking strawberries on Mort Dyer's land spelled trouble. Caleb is a thick-witted, slow-tongued mistake of a man that God should have by rights thrown away and started over. Most likely he would have been put away somewhere if Hi Atkins hadn't taken him in.

Hi was long widowed, as I am myself, and I don't mind admitting I'd been setting my cap for him—in a ladylike way, of course. But once Caleb came, Hi didn't feel so lonely rattling around in that big white farmhouse of his just down the road from my own. Not that I actually spied on him. His house is within easy viewing distance is all, and I felt it only neighborly to run down with supper or a few home-baked pastries now and again.

Hi was always delighted. "Why, thank you, Missus Corey. What a treat!" And his smile would spread all over his good-natured face and make me feel quite rewarded for my labors.

That stopped when Caleb moved in, because he turned out to be handy enough around a stove to suit two aging bachelors. Who would have thought it? Tell Caleb what to do just exactly so, real patient and clear, and he turned out to be as good to Hiram as a chef, and handy about the place in other ways as well. And of course he just

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about worshipped Hi. It got so Hi had only to think something, or feel a certain way, and Caleb would pick up on it and do what he could to put things right without Hi having to say a word.

Well, like I say, there was Caleb picking berries on Mort Dyer's land, which is across the street from Hiram, being as it once was part of Hi's woodlands. I couldn't help noticing as I had to walk right by on my way to deliver some pies to the store. Just the day before when Caleb had tried picking, Mort came shouting out of his house. Called Caleb a trespasser and told him get off Mort's property or get shot. Caleb got that message, right enough. He stumbled to his feet, the berries rolling every which way as he knocked over the pail in his panic. He hightailed it across the road like a kicked puppy. I was sweeping my front porch at the time, which is how I happened to see the whole thing.

Once Caleb has been scared off a place, he don't usually come back. So when I saw him back in the berry patch the very next day, I was concerned. "Mort's turned real unfriendly s[illegible] he met that cute widow from Carolina, Caleb," I warned hi[illegible]d get out of those berries before he catches you."

None of the neighbors were pleased when Mort built his split-level on what had been Hi's land. Cob's Corner is the kind of place where everybody has lived forever. Mort was a stranger, with only Hi's word that he'd be a good neighbor to make him tolerable to everybody. Hi's land had almost been public property, but when Hi's wife came down sick and needed nursing-home care, selling off his woods was the only way Hi could get the money he needed to keep her comfortable.

"Mort will be a good neighbor," Hi reassured everyone. "I've known him for years."

Good enough to allow hunting and fishing and berrying? Good enough to let Les Turnbull keep planting vegetables near the road? To let the kids use the treehouse they'd built in the woods? Didn't seem likely. So folks kept their distance while Mort's house was going up—low and modern, with black shutters and grey paint, and fitted out with so many new-fangled contraptions the house and grounds practically took care of themselves. But after Mort and his wife and son moved in, folks came to think Hi had told them true. The land was still for everyone's use. Mort Dyer was a good neighbor at first.

Jenny Atkins, Hi's daughter, was just twelve at the time, and Mort's son Dave was thirteen. They hit it off so good, living right

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across the road from one another, that when they grew up they married and moved down to Boston. Near broke my grandson Nelson's heart—he'd always been sweet on Jenny Atkins.

Caleb went on picking berries in his stolid way, the July sun falling thick as salve over his thick body. "Berries is ours." He squinted up at me to make sure I understood. Caleb always went to pieces if anyone thought badly of him, and he wasn't trespassing by his lights.

"Hi always had his berry patch on this side of the road," I agreed, "and Mort doesn't like berries. I guess there's no point letting them go to waste when they can be put to good use."

Caleb grunted, satisfied. I shifted the pies to my other arm and walked down the sun-baked road, puzzling about him and Mort. Caleb wasn't usually so indifferent to the threat of a confrontation and Mort would be out there yelling again as soon as he got up from his nap, I was sure.

Mort had been through a long spell of trouble. His son Dave was killed in a car crash on 128 outside Boston, and soon after that Mort's wife died sudden, with no warning. Mort went a bit strange and shut himself away from people for weeks at a time—didn't set foot off his own land for days. Hi took to buying his daily newspaper for him when he bought his own and leaving it inside the screen door. Mort drifted through life like a shadow until his sister coaxed him down to Carolina to visit her. He met this cute widow there.

Then he came to life fast enough. Went over to Portland to buy himself a closet full of courting clothes. Gave the house a fresh coat of paint and planted flowering dogwood trees out front. He asked his daughter-in-law, Jenny Atkins that was, to brighten up the inside with new curtains and slipcovers. Then he let slip that he meant to sell the place and move to Carolina. His cute widow had agreed to be the second Mrs. Dyer, but she didn't want to come north to live.

"No problem," Hi told Mort. "I'd like to have the land back for my grandson to inherit all in one piece. We more or less agreed I could buy back at the price I sold to you if you ever decided to sell."

But Mort went stubborn. "That wasn't a legal agreement, Hi. I have to get top price. My pension isn't enough to support a new wife who wants things a mite fancy."

Hi couldn't pay that kind of money. He was bitterly disappointed. "It's my land. It's been handed down in my family since pre-Revo-

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lutionary days. Since Maine was part of Massachusetts, this has been Atkins land."

"It *was* your land," Mort said. "Now it's mine and I'm selling for the best price."

Nothing could move him. It sure enough caused hard feelings, and there was Jenny right smack in the middle of those two stubborn Yankees, one her father and the other her father-in-law. She had moved back into her father's house with her little boy. Mort wouldn't come over to Hi's for dinner—Hi wouldn't have let him in if he did, once the bickering about the land started—so Jenny ran over to Mort's place days with his dinner on a covered plate. I just happened to see her often enough to know she did it regularly because my kitchen window looks out at an angle toward Mort's front door, and I could see her letting herself in every night at suppertime. But the two one-time friends didn't do things together any more. The only friendly thing left was that Hi still picked up Mort's newspaper when he bought his own.

I always liked Jenny. If Dave Dyer hadn't married her first, she probably would have been one of us Coreys and I'd be a great-grandmother. After Jenny and Dave Dyer married, Nelson took to wandering the world as a wildlife photographer, but he's a good boy, so when my husband died Nelson came home to take over the store, a grocery and variety that sits just across from the five-way joining of the roads that go north and south to Canada and Boston, and east to the sea. Nelson's heart wasn't really in it, though, until Jenny came home with her boy Davey. He perked up then. Came calling on Jenny as soon as ever, and she seemed mighty sweet on him, too. Young Davey liked Nelson, and both grandfathers—Mort and Hi—approved. I was hoping for an announcement any day.

Nelson was behind the counter ringing up orders when I came into the store with my fresh-baked pies. I liked to wait around, getting pleasure from the compliments as folks bought up my things as fast as they appeared.

Just when I thought I'd mistimed my visit, Hi came in for his newspaper, with Jenny and Davey in tow, and bought my last pie. Jenny, a sweet-looking girl with dove-grey eyes and a halo of blonde hair, smiled at Nelson. They made a handsome couple, Nelson straight and tall with a smile that made you feel good all over and Jenny pretty as an old-fashioned painting. Hi picked up some trifles for Davey along with his paper.

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One paper. So it had finally come to that. He and Mort had lost even that last gesture of friendship. It made me feel sad watching Hi pick up that single newspaper, even though I'd never had much to do with Mort.

Hi was still a fine-looking man, with a ruddy outdoors glow about him and a good head of hair that had silvered handsomely. Any woman would be proud to be his wife. Sometimes I thought nothing would ever come of my hankering for him, but nobody could say I didn't make the most of every opportunity.

"Pleasant day," I said, as if I'd just noticed.

He made a face and plunked down the money for his paper and Davey's things. "Not now, it isn't. Mort's about made up his mind to sell to Kilty Realty." He hooked his thumbs in his belt and looked as me as if anticipating some reaction, but the name meant nothing to me. "Fellow's coming tomorrow morning to seal the bargain. I tried again today to talk him into selling back to me. My girl tried, too. No use. He just wouldn't listen."

"Kilty Realty," I echoed, trying to pinpoint where I'd heard the name.

"They're the outfit that turns country into city," Hi said. "They want to build vacation condominiums on Mort's land and put in a garage and a row of fancy tourist stores as well."

I couldn't quite see that kind of construction rising between my meadowland and Hi's pasture. Parties and noise and traffic in a community that went to bed by nine and knew no noise louder than birds at daybreak or cows at milking time.

"We're prime vacation area," Hi said in a tone of disgust. "Close to the ocean for summer, close to ski country for winter. When Mort sells out, I'll have to get out, too, before the neighbors ride me out on a rail. Don't know what I'll do about Caleb. He's not very adaptable."

"Don't talk about leaving," I said. "Mort might change his mind at the last minute."

Hi shook his head. "Not a chance."

While I searched for something comforting to say, Jenny, who had been speaking quietly to Nelson, raised her voice to a normal level. "You're invited to dinner, Missus Corey, you and Nelson. We'll have steak with all the trimmings and strawberry shortcake for dessert."

I was pleased as can be. "Why, that's real nice of you, Jenny." Hardly anybody thinks to invite a good cook what's always doing

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for others to dinner. "I'll bring some of my special pickle-and-onion relish."

"We might even have some news for you," Nelson said with a grin so like his grandpa it made me lonesome for my Artie all over again. Jenny looked down with a shy smile and Nelson gave her hand a little squeeze. I could hear wedding bells drawing nearer, and a good thing, too. I could use more family to do for.

We had ourselves a right good meal. That Jenny isn't a half bad cook in spite of her college education and her years teaching art in the Boston schools. A real down-to-earth love of a girl, that's Jenny, and when Nelson announced they'd set the date for a fall wedding, dinner became a celebration.

It was real cheering to sit down to a full table, for a change—Hi at the head, Jenny and young Davey, who was up beyond his bedtime and getting sleepy, Nelson and myself, and Caleb Daniels, who was treated like family. Only one missing who might by rights have been there was Mort Dyer.

Once Nelson and Jenny married, Hi and I would be relatives in a way, and I might have more opportunity to become important to him. That thought made dinner extra nice. While we were lingering over seconds on the shortcake, Jenny put Davey to bed. When she came back to the kitchen, she took Mort's dinner out of the oven.

"What are you doing?" Hi asked, frowning.

"Oh, come on, Dad." Jenny gave him a light kiss on the top of his head in passing. "I don't like Mort selling to those builders any more than you do, but he's still old and widowed, and my father-in-law, and I'm going to bring him his dinner like I always do."

"It's the last time," Hi said. "After that real-estate man comes tomorrow, I'd better start looking around for a new home."

At that, Caleb pushed his plate away from him and thumped the table savagely.

"You stay!" he said so fiercely it made me jump. "This is home! *Our* home!" He thrust his jaw out belligerently and glared about so ferociously that for a moment I was afraid of him.

"I think," Jenny said into the peculiar silence that followed Caleb's outburst, "that Nelson should come to Mort's with me. Mort should hear we're getting married from us, and not second-hand."

"More than he deserves," Hi grumbled.

"Why don't you try talking sense to him one last time, Hiram?" I suggested . . .

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With one thing and another, we made quite a little procession across the road, Jenny and Nelson in the lead, and me following Hi. Not that I'd been asked, exactly, but nobody said I couldn't tag along.

"I don't want you coming over here doing for Mort any more, Jenny," Hi announced as we let ourselves in the front door. "Making slipcovers!"

Jenny wrinkled her nose at him. "I only have one cushion left, and that would have been finished if you hadn't come over here and raised cain." She went ahead of us to leave Mort's dinner on the kitchen table, then went down the hallway to his den to fetch him.

The air in the house, though appreciably cooler than outdoors, seemed stale. Mort liked to keep the windows shut. The furniture, precisely placed and never moved, had a neglected air. Jenny's new curtains and bright slipcovers, her sewing basket on the seat of the unfinished wingback, were the only signs of human warmth.

"I don't blame Mort for wanting to get away," Hi said in a burst of sympathy for his former friend. "This place has been like a morgue since his wife died."

Jenny came flying down the short hallway, her face white, and flung herself into Nelson's arms, sobbing. It was a minute or two before she managed to choke out, "Mort—I think he's dead!"

Mort was in the bedroom across from his den, lying peacefully in his bed like he had just laid himself down for a little rest. But he was never going to wake up from this nap. Somebody had thrust a pair of dressmaker's scissors so deep into his throat only the handles showed. Bright blue handles.

"Them's Jenny's shears!" Hi exclaimed over my shoulder. I was so overcome by the horror and shock of it all, I just naturally fell into his arms. It felt like coming home to have his arms around me. His voice murmured kind, calming things into my hair, maybe surprising him as much as me.

"We'll have to call Sheriff Barnes," Nelson said. "Let's go back to your place, Hi, so we don't disturb anything here."

That boy is a born leader, if I do say so myself. He took Jenny's arm and led her out gently. Hi, a comical look on his face as if he had liked me being in his arms as much as I liked being there, guided me in their wake.

Caleb had Hi's kitchen cleaned up and fresh coffee waiting. We could have used something stronger than coffee, but it wasn't my place to suggest it.

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"Let's think on this a spell," Hi said to Nelson as he wrapped his hands around his cup of hot coffee. "Sheriff Barnes is a good enough soul in his way, but you know he's not much brigher than a twenty-five-watt bulb. He'll take one look at them shears and arrest Jenny before you can say How-do."

"No motive," Nelson said.

"Well, yes, there is," Jenny murmured. Her eyes were worried in her white face. "After Dave died, Mort left the house and grounds to me in his will. The sale hasn't gone through. I'll inherit."

"Jenny, you wouldn't hurt a fly," Nelson said.

"You know that, and I know that," Hi told him, "and if the sheriff was even bright as forty watts, he'd know it, too. But unless we can offer him a better prospect, he'll have Jenny in jail before the night's over."

I gave Caleb a hard look.

"More coffee, Missus?" he asked.

Well, Caleb never did get hints.

"Did both you and Jenny see him today?" Nelson asked Hi.

Hi nodded. Jenny said, "I was over there this morning, slipcovering the wingback. Davey was with me. He and Mort went down to the basement. Mort had a wonderful set of trains and Davey never tired of playing with them."

Nelson's face clouded over. Jenny admitted to being on the scene. She had a motive and her shears had been the murder weapon. Sheriff Barnes would be convinced of her guilt.

Hi spoke up. "Jenny was there when I went over about noon to talk Mort into selling back to me one more time." He sighed heavily. "Wasted effort. We quarreled, and I left, taking Jenny and Dave with me."

"Then Mort was alive when you left," Nelson said.

"Alive and kicking," Hi said. "Shouting his head off. I was shouting, too. Wonder they didn't hear us clear over to Wells."

I had heard them, as a matter of fact. I'm only down the road a piece and my windows were open.

"How about you, Caleb?" Nelson asked. "Did you see Mort today?"

Caleb scratched his head. He opened his mouth, then shut it, as if thought, foreign to him, had taken flight. Finally he got out, "Picked berries."

"That's right, I saw him," I volunteered. "I asked if he wasn't afraid Mort would chase him away, like he did yesterday."

Caleb's face darkened. "*Our* berries," he said firmly. "Our land."

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He gave Hi a look of pure devotion, the kind of sheer affection humans usually only get from their dogs.

"What time was that?" Nelson asked.

Caleb shook his head.

"It was about four," I said. "I was on my way to drop off my pies at the store. The afternoon edition of the newspaper was in."

Hi drained his coffee and stared into the empty cup. "This looks bad for Jenny," he said as if thinking out loud. "Those are her scissors. It wouldn't take much strength for a woman to plunge them into a sleeping man. That's the first thing Barnes will think of—that Jenny went crazy for a minute when Mort wouldn't agree to sell back the land. Everyone knows how mothers are about looking out for their own."

"Sheriff Barnes never could see beyond his nose," Nelson agreed. But suddenly he seemed to find it hard to meet Hiram's eyes. "I noticed something when you came into the store today, Hi. You've always bought Mort's newspaper with your own. Today you only bought one." He had to clear his throat before he could ask, "Hi, could it be you bought just one paper because you knew Mort was already dead?"

There was a tense silence in the kitchen. Hiram's breath expired as a long sigh. "If you could think that, maybe the sheriff can, too," he said. "If he looks too hard at Jenny, I'll confess and I'll use the paper as proof."

I couldn't sit still for that. As if Hi would kill a soul! Would a woman of my moral fiber set her cap for a murderer? "Nelson, you're a good boy, and I always thought you were bright," I said, exasperated, "but you've missed the boat this time. How could Davey grow up here if it was all over town that one of his grandpas had murdered the other?"

Hi reached for his pipe and gave me a look that set my heart twittering. It was a look of appreciation, a warm, hard-thinking look.

"Way I see it," I went on, "somebody who didn't want Mort to sell that land took things into his own hands. Just walked in that unlocked front door, found Mort napping, and killed him, using the shears because they were handy." I stared straight at Caleb. He got up and started pouring more coffee for everybody. I got up and took the coffeepot out of his hands.

"Hi could go to jail for the rest of his life," I said slowly and firmly. "It's not right to let somebody be punished for a murder they didn't

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commit." I looked straight into Caleb's eyes. "It's almost the wrongest thing there is."

Caleb couldn't escape my eyes. His mouth began opening and closing, like a child getting ready to cry.

"You're upsetting him, Gran," Nelson said. "You know he can't stand being scolded." I was starting to think my grandchild wasn't as bright as I'd thought, after all, when he got it. *"Caleb?"* he said.

"Of course, Caleb. He wouldn't have been calmly helping himself to strawberries this afternoon after being run off yesterday unless he knew Mort wouldn't come out shouting at him again. And how would he know that?"

"Caleb," Hi said, getting up and putting his hand protectively on Caleb's shoulder. "Did you kill Mort?"

So help me if that poor creature didn't begin to cry, big childish tears. He looked trustingly at Hi. "Our land!" he said fiercely. "Our home!" And he blubbered like a baby in his fear of displeasing Hiram, who looked as stunned as if a cow had fallen on him.

The police found all kinds of proof. Fingerprints and dirt and whatall. No jury hereabouts would be too hard on Caleb. When he heard Mort and Hi shouting at each other, he got it into his head that the only way to make things right was by killing Mort so he couldn't sell off his land. Caleb knew what it was like to have no home. He'd been homeless until Hiram had taken him in.

"It's hard to tell if he understands exactly what he's done," Nelson reflected.

"We'll all visit him," I said. "I'll bring him some good homemade food."

At that, Hi touched my arm. "You're a good neighbor, Annie," he said, using my name for the first time, like he was tasting it. "What say you and I find something to do with ourselves and give these two lovebirds some privacy?"

Nothing could have suited me better.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"I thought you were a movie actor or something," Denzil said. "You look like Paul Newman."

Cruft began to giggle, then groaned and balanced the aching shoulder with his good arm. "It only hurts when I laugh," he said.

"What's funny?"

"I remembered you *because you look like Richard Pryor. Do you know who he is?"*

"He's my man," Denzil said . . .

MEAN CHARACTERS

by WILLIAM BANKIER

There were ducks on the river, dozens of them floating with the tide, and a turmoil of gulls stealing from each other. Leonard Cruft watched one more tourist boat pass beneath Battersea Bridge, fragments of the guide's amplified spiel reaching him where he stood leaning on the embankment wall. "Historic residences," the guide said. And "Belloc" and "Turner."

Cruft stared downriver at the greenery of Battersea Park. He decided he would cross over to the park, treating himself to a soft ice-cream from the van which was always parked outside the gate. It was three o'clock. He would find an empty bench, take the notebook from his briefcase, and the lucky pen he had bought himself years ago before leaving Toronto. It would require an hour to give his radio drama a final polish. Then he would go back to the apartment and start typing.

What happened after he began walking could only be measured

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in micro-seconds. He sensed somebody behind him. At the same time as the briefcase was grabbed, Cruft heard an impatient voice mutter something like, "Gimme that!" Taken completely by surprise, he would marvel for the rest of his life at his instinctive reaction. Instead of releasing their grip, his fingers locked on the handle like a mechanical clamp.

A fleeting thought crossed his mind. Some friend was playing a trick on him, giving him a harmless "Gotcha!" No. He turned and saw the stranger wrenching with both hands at the body of his briefcase, twisting it, leaning back, teeth clenched, eyes frowning intensely. The mugger's face was familiar. He looked like the American film and television comedian, Richard Pryor.

Cruft had both hands on the briefcase handle now, was being flung about, hurled off balance. He rolled to the pavement, sprawling on his back, the assailant standing over him exerting all his strength in a series of pulls to rip the case from his grasp.

"No!" Cruft roared, full voice. "There's nothing in it. Nooo!" His checkbook was inside, along with his wallet, some cash and credit cards, but he had forgotten about these negotiable items. All the writer saw in his mind's eye was the spiral-bound notebook, its pages scrawled on both sides with the manuscript of his precious radio drama. The writing had taken three weeks, the dreaming much longer. Gone, it could never be achieved again. Not in its unique form. The thief was going to have to take Cruft's arms out at the shoulder.

"Help!" Cruft roared at such volume that the whited eyes above him winced. He did it again. "Heeeeeeeeeelp!" while the tussle went on.

So much heavy traffic rolls along Chelsea Embankment with so many diesel engines thundering that most pedestrians give the broad pavement a miss. Cruft was one of the very few to make it part of his daily stroll. No other citizen was within sight as the roughhouse took place. But a giant glass-topped coach on its way to the airport hissed to a stop. The door swung open and the driver dropped down, followed by several male passengers. The posse approached tentatively, without leadership.

Cruft fell back as the mugger released his hold and ran, darting between moving vehicles, vanishing onto Beaufort Street. People helped him to his feet, brushed him off. "He didn't get it," was what Cruft said. "Thanks. Thanks."

"Are you all right?"

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"I'm okay." Cruft felt as if he'd been dragged behind a horse. The world seemed very bright. He saw decent, oddly shaped faces full of concern. His rescuers drifted back to their coach, watching him across their shoulders.

It became apparent to Cruft after a few minutes leaning on the river wall that he was injured. The right arm could not be raised, the shoulder felt shattered. He knew St. Stephen's Hospital was not far away on the Fulham Road—last year he had visited one of the actresses from *The Mastersons* who was in for a hysterectomy. Part of his job on the team of scriptwriters for the BBC Radio soap opera had been to write the lady out of several weeks' episodes.

They were good to him in the Casualty Department at St. Stephen's. After four years in England, Cruft was still fascinated by the efficiency of the National Health Service. The village of Clayford in Ontario where he was born had no hospital. Baytown, where he attended high school, had a hospital but the facilities were limited. Working as a writer for the CBC in Toronto, Cruft had a couple of minor medical experiences. The big-city hospital was good. "But it could cost you an arm and a leg," he told his English friends. "No joke intended."

Here in London this afternoon in the emergency ward, he was interviewed by a kindly nurse, seen by a specialist, put through X-rays, spoken to again by the senior man, advised that nothing was broken, fitted with a sling, and sent on his way with the suggestion that he get some paracetemol at the chemist's for the pain. No bill was rendered. He was free and clear.

It seemed appropriate to Cruft that the nurse who knotted the sling behind his collar was blacker than the man who had attacked him. He liked the balance. She asked him how the injury had been done and he told her about the mugging, not mentioning the fact of the man's color. But her eyes held his as she said, "Some of them are so *desperate*."

She left Cruft in his cubicle and went to give her expertise and the benefit of her sweet nature to some other damaged person. "You rest there for a while," she told him. "You don't have to go till you feel like it."

It hurt even to shift from sitting to a standing position. How was he going to be able to type? How long would it be before he could get back to work? Cruft walked past a row of cubicles and was brought to a stop by a voice behind a curtain. "Twisted it when my foot missed the curb." Cruft's internal computer matched the speech

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pattern with the instruction he had been given on the street. "Gimme that."

Backing up a step, he glanced past the edge of the curtain. There was the familiar face wreathed in pain now as a doctor manipulated the ankle for evidence of a fracture. Cruft's heart pounded as he moved on. What a brilliant coincidence—but then again no more exceptional than several others he had experienced. This bastard was going to find the police waiting for him when he came out of the surgery.

But by the time Cruft reached the reception area, he was having second thoughts. What if he were to ask the girl behind the desk to dial 999 and get the police in? They would arrive, there would be all kinds of disruption, Cruft would confront the accused, who would deny everything. One man's word against the other's. How certain was he of the identification anyway? Could he possibly tell investigating officers that he knew this was the mugger because he looked like a TV comic?

Cruft went outside, where he stood on an area of tarmac reserved for staff cars. His mind was in turmoil. He wanted to face this man who had tried to rob him. At the same time, he was afraid of him. He was in pain—he should get to a chemist's and buy some paracetemol. Unless the police came into it, there was no point in talking to the bastard. There would be anger on both sides, nothing settled, possibly more pain. Still Cruft stood in the shade of the building, easing his arm about in the sling to find a more comfortable angle.

Movement in the hospital doorway. The young man was coming through, limping on a cane. His right ankle was strapped in a heavy bandage, the shoe laced only partway. Cruft let him get within a couple of yards, then stepped into sight. "Surprise, surprise," he said.

The man stopped. "Hey," was all he said, quietly.

"I should beat your brains out with this." Cruft raised the briefcase with his good arm. "But I'm in too much pain. Thanks to you."

"What's in that thing, you hold on so tight."

"Maybe I'll call the police."

"I won't be here. You can't hold me, you're crocked." The young man eased himself closer. With the rubber tip of his cane, an aluminum affair with a curved brace for his forearm, he reached out and touched the briefcase. "What you got in that thing? You carrying a payroll?"

"Now I understand why you tried so hard. What a mind you've got."

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"I was following you. Where is this geezer going, I ask myself. But you weren't going anywhere. You just lay across that river wall, watching the boats."

It was now clear to Cruft, after even this brief conversation, that there would be no fighting between the two of them. Throughout his life he had always got on well with almost everybody. It was Cruft's method to say things that would make people like him. He knew himself as not exactly a puppy-dog but he had often thought that he might have made a good politician. Now he said, "I know you never intended to hurt me." He moved the sling. "This was an accident."

"It was you hanging on like that thing grew out of your hand."

"How did you damage your foot?"

"What you carrying in there? Come on, no harm you telling me now."

"A manuscript. A radio play I've been writing for months. If it vanished, I could never do it again."

"I was after money. I don't want your play."

"What would you have done? A notebook full of scribbling—you'd have thrown it away."

"Is your address inside?"

Cruft gave it some thought. "Yes, on a letter from the BBC."

"Then I would have posted it to you."

"Sure. After you'd stolen some old lady's handbag to get money for stamps."

The young man turned and moved haltingly toward the hospital gateway. Cruft followed, overtaking him easily. "I can walk circles around you now."

"Get away from me."

"How did you do your ankle?"

"Running from all those crazy people came off the coach. Halfway up Beaufort Street, crossing over, I missed the curb."

"Does it hurt?"

"A lot."

"Good."

They were outside the gateway now, standing by the Fulham Road. On the other side of the street, half a block away, Cruft saw a pub called The Somerset. He heard himself saying, "Come on, I'll buy you a beer."

"Leave it out." The frowning eyes conveyed suspicion.

"Come on."

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"You get me sitting down, you'll have them call the cops."

"What for? You never got my briefcase. I'm hurt, sure, but so are you. The only satisfaction for me would be if I could clobber you myself, but I can't do it now." Cruft allowed his attacker a smile. "I'm not sure I ever could."

The young man smiled back. "We're a couple of mean characters, right?"

His name was Denzil Roberts. Cruft paid for the beer because Denzil had no money. "My sister promised me ten quid but I didn't see her this week."

Cruft raised his glass. "Here's to the walking wounded." He felt fortified, the beneficiary of rich experience now that he had not only survived a mugging but had become a companion of the mugger. It was as if all other potential assailants would keep their distance now that one of their own was at his table.

"Show me your play."

"Nothing to see."

"Show me. I never saw what a writer does."

Cruft lifted his briefcase onto his lap but he couldn't manipulate the snaps. Denzil did it for him and they peered together into the leather-lined interior. Cruft's wallet and checkbook lay beside the spiral-bound notebook. Both men stared at the evidence of financial stability for a moment. Then Cruft lifted out the notebook and passed it over. Denzil turned the pages. They were dark with scribbling.

"How long it take you to do all this?" he said respectfully.

"Weeks of actual writing. A lot longer thinking about it."

Denzil read the title. "The End of Everything." He handed the work back to Cruft. "When they going to do it on the radio?"

"Maybe never. I haven't shown it to anybody yet. I have to type it first."

"You do all that work and maybe nobody will buy it?"

"There's no other way."

Denzil considered this. He drank some beer. At last he smiled as if the magician's trick had been revealed to him. "You do it because you like it."

They were finishing their second pint and the pub was rumbling with conversation from a capacity crowd when Denzil informed Cruft that he had been following him since Cruft's visit to the automatic cash-dispenser outside the Natwest Bank on the King's Road.

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"I took thirty pounds," Cruft said. "You were never getting rich off that."

"I thought you were a movie actor or something. You look like Paul Newman."

Cruft began to giggle, then groaned and balanced the aching shoulder with his good arm. "It only hurts when I laugh," he said.

"What's funny?"

"I remembered *you* because you look like Richard Pryor. Do you know who he is?"

"He's my man," Denzil said. He glared fiercely, put his head close to Cruft's, and mouthed a few sentences full of obscenities after the style of the comedian.

They both laughed and Cruft said, "I have to get something for this pain." He looked at his watch. "No chemists open at this hour."

"Sure they are. There's one open late in Earl's Court. You spring for a taxi, I'll show you where it is."

Climbing into the taxi was difficult, and a couple of bumps across rough paving made Cruft gasp and grit his teeth. Denzil watched him apprehensively. "Hang on," he said. "We get you that medicine."

The paracetemol was so cheap, less than a penny a tablet, that Cruft couldn't raise much faith in its power to ease his pain. But he popped two of them as he left the counter and went looking for Denzil. He found him shifting his feet on the pavement outside the front door. "I took the pills," he said, "but I don't know."

"This is for you." Denzil handed Cruft a new notebook, spiral-bound, glossy red cover, a duplicate of the one in which he had composed his play.

"Where did you get this?"

"There's a shelf of them near the door."

"You don't have any money."

"I nicked it. Eighty-nine pence, man. Do you want it?" Denzil's face portrayed deep outrage. "Your other one is full up. You're gonna need a new one when you start work again."

Cruft allowed himself a shallow laugh that hardly hurt at all. He raised his briefcase, and when Denzil opened the snaps he dropped the notebook inside and the men came closer to each other in a movement that pressed the case shut. "Thanks," he said.

It was possible to walk to Cruft's apartment in Gloucester Road. Denzil insisted on accompanying him. "You got those pills inside you now on top of the beer. I better keep an eye on you."

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Limping through dark, quiet streets, they kept up a flow of low-key conversation.

"That play of yours, if nobody buys it, how do you pay the rent?"

"I do other work. Ever hear the radio series, *The Mastersons*?"

"All the time. It's been going all my life."

"I'm one of the writers."

Denzil stood still while Cruft moved on ahead. "You write *The Mastersons*?"

"Me and several other people."

"But you're an American."

"Canadian. I worked on a similar series in Toronto. The producer was from England. He learned his trade on *The Mastersons*. When I decided to leave Canada, he gave me a letter to the brass over here."

"But how do you get it right? The stuff about the village?"

"Villages are all the same. I come from one in Ontario. The important thing is the people, why they act the way they do."

Denzil limped along in silence. Then he said, "I could write a book about that."

As they approached the entrance to his basement apartment in Fennel Lane, and while he was fishing for his key, Cruft said, "I must be crazy to let you know where I live."

"You mean I'll come in when you're not here and rip the place off."

"Yes."

"You really believe I'd steal from you? Now that we know each other?"

After a moment's thought, Cruft said, "No, I don't believe that." He set down his briefcase on the bottom level of the concrete steps. It fell over. Denzil picked it up and held it. As he unlocked the door, pushed it open, reached inside, and switched on a light, Cruft winced. His companion said from the darkness, "How are you going to do for yourself in there?"

"With great difficulty."

"You better let me come in and help you."

"I won't say no."

Extreme pain was generated when Cruft tried to raise his right arm getting out of his shirt. Denzil took hold of the fabric and drew it carefully over Cruft's head as the injured man leaned forward. Working together, they got Cruft out of his clothes and into a pair

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of pajamas. Denzil hobbled to the sink and drew a glass of water. "We sure are a pair of crocks," he said.

Cruft was searching in a cabinet, using one arm. "I took two pills at the chemist's, I can't have any more for four hours." He brought out a brandy bottle, almost full. "Bring a couple of those glasses," he said.

They sipped brandy in the main room, Cruft perched on the edge of his bed. Denzil turned the wooden chair away from the desk and sat on that. While they talked, his head kept turning as he glanced at pages of typescript. It emerged that the Roberts family lived in Battersea, the father employed by London Transport as a bus inspector, mother a big mover at the Baptist Church, sister Beverly a school teacher in Wandsworth. Denzil was no longer domiciled at home because his old man was a strict disciplinarian and there had been one fight too many. So he was bunking in with somebody named Manfred Marcos who played percussion and sang with a rock group called Tedium.

Refilling the glasses, feeling less pain now, Cruft said, "You come across as an intelligent guy. How come you—"

Denzil was ready for it. "What's a nice bloke like you doing stealing for a living? Have you any idea how tough it is to get a job?"

"I know it's difficult. What are the figures—twelve percent unemployed?"

"That's white. Adult. Young people it's twenty percent. Black young people, over fifty percent."

"Okay." Cruft felt comfortable with this problem because it was not his. Most of the time he nursed fictional characters through preposterous situations. "But that still leaves fifty percent in work. Half. It can't be easy, but surely it's worth making the effort. So you can live with yourself."

Denzil let out breath like a blast of steam. He raised his aluminum cane. "Man, I'm close to laying this across your head."

"Wouldn't surprise me."

"The half that's working includes all the senior people like my old man who came here from the Islands after the war to take jobs with the Transport. They were invited because jobs were plentiful and nobody else wanted to drive the Underground trains. You try being young and black in England this year. You go for an interview where fifty people apply and ten of them are black. Tell the truth. If you're the one handing out the job, would you give it to one of the blacks or one of the whites?"

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Cruft had to say, "Most likely to one of the whites."

"That's right. I've been there dozens of times. And I'm not going any more."

It was when he tried to lie down that Cruft's shoulder gave him the most hell. He gasped, whistled, held himself rigid, head a few inches above the pillow. Denzil set his glass aside and ran to give help. He took the weight, lowered Cruft slowly, eased him into a bearable position on his back. " 'Kay now? You gonna be all right?"

"Think so. Hope I'm drunk enough to sleep."

"I'm really sorry—I never meant to hurt you."

"It took two of us, Denzil. If I hadn't held on—"

Sometime later Cruft opened his eyes and saw his companion sitting close to the bed, watching him. Half asleep, Cruft grinned and said, "Perpetrator and victim—partners in crime."

"Try to sleep."

"Don't you have a home to go to?"

"Too late for tonight. Anyway, the buses have stopped and I don't fancy walking on this ankle."

"Stay here if you want to."

"Thanks."

When Cruft drifted up from sleep later on, the room was dark. He felt a presence against his side, a weight across his chest. Denzil was lying beside him, one arm thrown over. Cruft smiled to himself as reassurance covered him like a warm blanket. He was a child again back in Clayford, tucked safely in bed close to his brother Luke, who was breathing peacefully in the darkness.

Preparing something to eat in the morning required Cruft to develop new ways of using his left hand. The right was only effective when that arm was held close to the body. Moving slowly and with two pills swallowed, he began to feel satisfaction at his ability to survive the crisis.

He was eating cereal when the telephone rang. The caller was Denzil Roberts. "I wondered what happened to you," Cruft said.

"You were out like a light so I sneaked away."

"How's the ankle?"

"Better. Did you take the inventory?"

"What?"

"To find out if I stole anything?"

"You're welcome to anything you find in this place. Everything

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I value is in the briefcase." Cruft felt suddenly cold. His silence conveyed anxiety down the line.

"Calm down, I never took it." Denzil began to laugh. "But what a good joke after the hospital and the pub and last night. I wish I'd thought of it."

In the days that followed, Denzil came regularly to Fennel Lane to help Cruft get along. He did some cleaning, cooked a few meals, went out to the shops, carried away a sack of soiled clothing and brought the things back from the launderette—washed, dried, and folded neatly. Cruft's comment was, "You'll make somebody a good wife, Den."

"That's what Marcos says."

Cruft's mood was optimistic when he was able to write freely in longhand, the only problem being his inability to operate the typewriter. He hoped he would start catching up in that department in a week or so. Meanwhile, the BBC came through with a check for three back episodes of *The Mastersons,* so there was money in the bank. "When am I going to meet the mysterious Marcos?" he asked.

"Anytime. You want to go today?"

"Why not? Tomorrow may be cancelled due to lack of interest."

The apartment in Battersea was on the seventh floor of a modern highrise. Cruft was impressed by the quality of the building, the clean entrance free of graffiti, the functioning elevator. Denzil observed his companion's reaction and drew satisfaction from it. "My friend Manfred knows the right people," was his somewhat cryptic explanation.

Standing in the corridor outside 722, ringing the bell, Denzil said, "When I start sharing the rent—that's when I get a key, Manfred says."

"Sounds like you exchanged one tough father for another," Cruft said.

The door swung open. Manfred Marcos stood revealed as a golden man, heavy-set, of Polynesian appearance. His glossy black hair hung shoulder-length, the ends colored bright yellow in a one-inch band. He was dressed all in powder-blue—shoes, slacks, voluminous shirt with the tails not tucked in. "The famous writer," Marcos said in a lisping voice. "To what do I owe this honor?"

They followed him into a room festooned with musical instruments—lutes, guitars, mandolins, a fiddle tinted red. One wall displayed a montage of LP covers, most of them featuring photographs

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of four men in dramatic poses. The albums identified the group as Tedium and Manfred Marcos was the character with the smile.

The musician went to stand behind a chest-high cocktail drum as if it was a pulpit and he the preacher. Fat brown hands brushed a shuffling rhythm from the drum.

"We praise Thee, oh, God," he chanted,

"We acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.

"But not this lousy government

"That beats on common people—"

Denzil said, "He's telling you how the group got its name. One of the guys used to be organist with a church choir. The white bloke in the photo. He took the Te Deum, one of the chants from the Anglican service, adapted the tune, and changed the words. They sold a million copies."

"I get it," Cruft said. "Tedium."

"He gets it," Marcos echoed. "Not as stupid as he looks. But then, who could be that stupid?"

"Manfred kids a lot," Denzil said.

"Relax," said Cruft, feeling tense as a cat. "I work for the BBC—I run into idiots and fat-heads all the time."

Marcos left his drum and laid himself out gracefully for such a heavy man on a leather settee. "So you're the lad with the grip of iron," he mocked.

"Who wants a drink?" Denzil asked.

"Why, did you bring a bottle with you?"

"Nothing for me," Cruft said.

"Go ahead," Marcos relented, wrinkling his nose at Denzil. "Pour the wine, unhappy boy."

As he handed 'round glasses of red, Denzil said, "Please, Manfred. If Beverly comes in, don't mention I tried to nick Lennie's briefcase. We met in a pub, okay?"

"I have no interest in exposing you to your sister as the vile person you are," Marcos said. He nuzzled his glass, raised wet lips, and smiled like a dolphin.

"I'm to meet your sister as well?" Cruft said. "This *is* my lucky day."

Denzil put a record on the machine, something by the Manfred Marcos band. As he listened, Cruft had to confess to himself that it was far from bad. Unlike many current groups, this one didn't depend on a monotonous electronic beat or on obtrusive effects like echo and reverb, nor was there a tenor saxophone sounding like the

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ghost of Lester Young coughing into a rain barrel. Here was a discernible melody, sweetly surprising like some of the Beatles' work. And the band swung—due to the drive of Marcos himself on percussion, Cruft hated to admit. Most of the musicians he had met were to-the-manor-born but a few of the best, unfortunately, were proper bastards.

"I can't believe it," Marcos said when the track ended. "*The Mastersons.* You actually write that rubbish."

"It's a living." Cruft despised himself for apologizing. "We make it as good as we can."

"He's working on something better. A serious play," Denzil said. "Once his shoulder heals and he can type, he's sending it in to the BBC."

A buzzer sounded. Denzil hurried out of the room. He began to say something at the door but the newcomer didn't stay to listen. She strode into the living room, a tall woman, darker than Denzil, wearing a one-piece track suit in pale-yellow, carrying the motorbiker's mandatory helmet under one arm and a gift-wrapped package in her other hand. She went straight to Marcos, set down the package, took a wad of money from her breast pocket and handed it to the musician.

"There," she said. "Fifty quid, count it. And stop moaning about what my brother owes you."

"What did you sell, darling?" Marcos asked. "Your Honda or yourself?"

Denzil crept in and made himself small on a chair against the wall. "You don't have to bail me out, Bev," he said.

Beverly turned to Cruft. "You must be the new friend."

"Len Cruft." By keeping his right elbow pressed against his side, Cruft was able to shake hands.

"I hope you're a better influence than some of the others."

"She don't mean present company," Denzil said.

"Yes, she does," Marcos said. "Teaching school has spoiled that girl's character."

Beverly retrieved the package and handed it to her brother. "Happy birthday last week," she said. "It wasn't ready."

"I know what this must be," Denzil said as he took care in slipping off the ribbon and detaching patches of transparent tape. Until he had flattened and folded the wrapping paper neatly, he refused to lift the lid from the box. When he did, he uncovered a bulky cardigan sweater, jet-black wool with a column of antique silver buttons.

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Cruft, for one, had never seen such a splendid garment. Denzil put it on over his T-shirt and struck a pose. He looked handsome in it. Beverly's face was split with pride.

"Too hot to keep it on today," she advised. "Save it for the autumn." Beverly turned to Cruft. "I hear you're a writer."

"Guilty as charged." Cruft decided to pre-empt the impending insult from Marcos. "I write episodes for a radio series, *The Mastersons*. It's ordinary stuff but it pays the rent."

"That family has been going on forever." Beverly's smile diffused her sultry beauty. "I listen whenever I get the chance."

"He's also writing a serious play," Denzil said.

"Wake up, meathead," Marcos said. "You almost missed your cue."

Beverly seized her helmet. She flung it side-arm at Marcos, who took a solid thump on the stomach. As he bent double, she said, "Think fast."

"I don't need you to protect me," Denzil said.

"You let him talk to you like that."

"He's only kidding."

"No, he isn't. He's full up with hostility and he keeps dumping it on you."

"This play I'm writing," Cruft said. Since childhood, he had never failed to be distressed by argument. His way of defending was to introduce good humor into the situation. It seldom failed. As a student, busing in from Clayford to Baytown High School, he often encountered the patronizing attitude of Baytown kids who, incredibly since their own town was not much more than a whistle-stop, chose to call the commuters farmers. The favorite insult was for a Baytowner to yell across the gymnasium floor at some boy with sunburned neck and arms, "Hey, farmer!" Cruft's response would be to reply in a Mortimer Snerd voice, "Duuuh, yup." They liked the way he swallowed their guff and made them laugh.

Now he diverted the bickering trio by talking about the play he was writing. "As soon as I can type the script, I'll submit it to the Beeb." He laughed. "I hope my shoulder never gets better. This way I postpone the rejection."

Beverly said, "How did you hurt your shoulder?"

"He went to bed drunk and slept all night on his arm," Denzil said. Marcos punctuated this explanation with a flourish on the big drum.

"It only hurts when I type," Cruft said.

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"I don't have anything to do for the next week," Beverly said. "It's school holidays and I finished the sweater. Let me type it."

"Why not?" Cruft said without conviction, never having let anybody else so much as glance at work in progress.

He set the pay for the job at a hundred pounds, but Beverly would only agree to seventy-five. Denzil brought her around to the basement apartment in Fennel Lane where Cruft familiarized her with the typewriter and with his cryptic handwriting. Then they left her to it and went for a beer.

"How come a useless character like you," Cruft asked, "can have such a terrific sister?"

"It's easier to be a girl."

When they got back, hours later, she had completed twenty pages of script. Cruft glanced at the work. It looked beautifully organized and not a mistake as far as he could see. "You're fantastic," he said, taking her by the shoulders.

"Just an average girl," she said, "from the planet Krypton."

The next day, knowing her way, Beverly came alone. Cruft stayed in, brought her coffee and a sandwich, read his newspaper in a corner by the other window while she clattered away, page following page. When the sun went down, he poured a couple of drinks. "One more session and you'll be finished," he said.

"I've promised Denzil and Manfred I'll take them out for a pizza on my wages."

"Don't blow your money on those guys."

"You, too."

Cruft sipped his whiskey. They were knee to knee by the desk. He reached across her to lift the latest page, saw the neat lines of type. "You've taken such a weight off my mind."

"Glad to help my brother's friend."

"His sister's friend, too," Cruft said.

This drink and part of a second had an effect on Beverly Roberts. She went to sit on the settee, undulating on stocking feet. It was silly to remain at the desk, so Cruft went and sat beside her. "You're a good man," she said. Her hand on his cheek turned his head and when she kissed him it was like when Cruft as a child used to bring his face close to the coal stove in the kitchen. He put his arm around her, kissed her forehead. She swung a leg astride him, snapped a clasp, shrugged, presented bare shoulders, arms, breasts. She drew his face against the flaming skin.

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After a while, as Cruft made no move, she said, "Is it because I'm black?"

"I don't think so," he said. He told her something he had never admitted to a living soul. "It's probably because you're a woman."

Everybody was in a boisterous mood. Cruft paid out the cash to Beverly, tried to make it a hundred, and ended up taking back twenty-five under threat of damage to his good arm. "Hey," he said, "I'm not about to trust the post office. I'm going to pack this script in an envelope, take the tube to Oxford Circus, walk up Regent Street, and deliver it by hand to Broadcasting House."

"Right on," Denzil said in his parody voice.

"I hope everybody's hungry," Beverly said. "Deep-dish pizza and a bottle of wine."

Manfred Marcos was at the desk, turning pages of script. "Listen to this," he said. He lowered his voice to a lugubrious baritone. "I want you to show me where your father keeps the stuff." Then he switched to soprano. "Daddy never told me."

Denzil and Beverly glanced at Cruft, who grinned and said, "It doesn't sound like much read out of context."

Marcos flipped a page. "We all choose the way we want to go," he read in a sing-song. "We have nobody else to blame." He pinched his nose. "My gawd, this is worse than *The Mastersons*!"

Denzil attacked Marcos from behind, seized his shoulders and swung him away from the desk. The fabric of the musician's shirt ripped down the arm. "You don't know anything!" Denzil screamed. "Shut your mouth! Shut up!" He was trying to knee Marcos, who twisted away.

"You've destroyed my shirt, you fool! I paid thirty pounds for this shirt!"

"Everybody cut it out," Beverly said.

"You've been full of it for years," Denzil yelled. "I'm sick of you, man. Who needs a second-rate drummer like you!"

Marcos rounded on Cruft. "You're welcome to this pile of self-pity. Maybe he can steal enough to pay part of your rent."

"You'd better go, Manfred." Beverly moved closer. "For you, the party's over."

As Marcos went to the door, Denzil screamed after him, "Get your ass out of here, drag-beat! You can't even keep time!"

The musician's eyes were almost closed. "I'm going to fix you, Denzil."

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With Marcos gone, Cruft tried to rescue the situation but the celebratory mood was finished for the day. "Let's do it tomorrow," Beverly said, gathering up her handbag and her helmet.

"Don't you go after him," Denzil advised her.

"No fear. That man is crazy. The farther away from him we all stay, the better."

They listened to the kick and roar of her bike as she left the lane. Then Cruft got out the whiskey bottle and a couple of glasses, filled the ice bucket and the water carafe. He made two drinks and carried them to the settee. The sun was going down. It was quiet now in the lane and the men drank without saying much. A few brief statements on mental health put the Marcos incident behind them. Cruft leafed through the television guide and found a good film listed for the late evening, but they agreed to take that as it came. Two more drinks.

Later Denzil said, "I've been thinking about what I'm going to do with my life."

"Good man."

"Bev's bike gave me the idea. If I can get hold of enough cash to buy myself one like hers, I can work as a messenger. You know—delivering packages and letters around London."

"I know."

"I've been around here all my life. These streets are like the back of my hand."

Cruft took hold of Denzil's hand, turned it over to inspect the back of it. "These streets at *night,*" he said, "are like the back of your hand." They laughed.

Then Denzil said, "The thing is to get the money for a bike."

"No problem. If this script of mine sells, and despite the comments of friend Marcos I have a feeling it will, my fee from the Corporation will be large. A couple of grand, anyway. I'll lend you the money to buy a bike."

Denzil's face was radiant. "Lennie, if you do that for me, you'll be saving my life."

"Consider it done."

During the next hour they finished the bottle, anchoring the liquor with toasted cheese sandwiches. Denzil talked about hiring other lads with bikes to work for him. He would get his own company operating—Roberts Express Deliveries. This was the way he would make it, would become independent.

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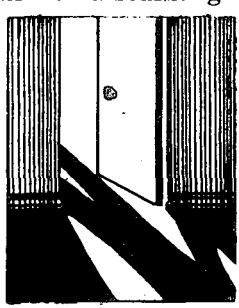
"Why not?" Cruft said. "It won't be easy, but you can do it."

Returning from rinsing dishes and glasses at the sink, Cruft found Denzil on the settee with his head back, his eyes closed. "You feel like going out now?" When his friend made no reply, Cruft sat down beside him, felt cool leather behind his neck, relaxed, let out his breath in a lengthy sigh. It always felt good when a project was completed. If this play worked, there might be others. He would graduate from the soap opera to a career as a legitimate radio playwright. Something for the stage? Not impossible.

Pretty good, he thought, for a lad from Clayford. Those Baytown snobs would rub their eyes when word got back how well he was doing in England. Not that they would ever hear about his success—the Baytown horizon ended approximately six miles down the road.

Cruft's head fell sideways, touching the brow of Denzil Roberts. His breathing established itself in a regular pattern to correspond with that of his companion. Neither one of them heard the footsteps of Manfred Marcos approaching down the lane, his descent of the concrete steps, nor the squeak of the letterslot as he forced it open to accept the mouth of a giant bottle full of kerosene. The splash of liquid cascading onto the floor of the hallway went unnoticed. So did the thump of ignition as Marcos inserted a burning rag into the aperture.

Old woodwork, ancient wallpaper, frayed carpet—everything was quickly ablaze. The holocaust was established when Cruft came partly awake. But he mistook the dancing shadows and the smell of smoke for Halloween celebrations in a field near the farmhouse when he was ten years old. They were roasting ears of corn over a banked fire, he and brother Luke and friends from all over the county. If the noise got any worse, he decided, he would send the lot of them home rather than risk disturbing his parents.



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SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

SPECIAL SERVICES

MAIL Forwarding and message service. Worldwide. Established 1970. Member Chamber of Commerce. MCCA, P.O. Box 2870, Estes Park, Colorado 80517. 1-800-525-5304.

STAMP COLLECTING

30 OUTER SPACE only 25¢ to introduce our Foreign Approvals. Weblor, 140 Elm, No. Reading, MA 01864.

TAIWAN MANUFACTURERS

TAIWAN MANUFACTURERS NAMES & ADDRESSES. DEAL DIRECT. List of 100 $4.95. Daley Wholesale, Box 113, Mohawk, New York 13407.

TAPES & CASSETTES

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UNUSUAL BOOKS

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PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
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or

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR FICTION COMBINATIONS:
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Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $59.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.95 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $2.95 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each
Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by _____ x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example. One 20 word ad $59.00 x 3 months = $177.00 x .85 = $150.45)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$59.00**	(2) **$59.00**	(3) **$59.00**	(4) **$59.00**	(5) **$59.00**
(6) **$59.00**	(7) **$59.00**	(8) **$59.00**	(9) **$59.00**	(10) **$59.00**
(11) **$59.00**	(12) **$59.00**	(13) **$59.00**	(14) **$59.00**	(15) **$59.00**
(16) **$59.00**	(17) **$59.00**	(18) **$59.00**	(19) **$59.00**	(20) **$59.00**
(21) **$61.95**	(22) **$64.90**	(23) **$67.85**	(24) **$70.80**	(25) **$73.75**
(26) **$76.70**	(27) **$79.65**	(28) **$82.60**	(29) **$85.55**	(30) **$88.50**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

NEXT ISSUE...

11 *NEW* stories—including

STANLEY ELLIN (about unacceptable procedures)

JOYCE PORTER (about Inspector Dover)

CLARK HOWARD (about last chances)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Libby Knowles)

PETER LOVESEY (about vandals)

WILLIAM BANKIER (about the working class)

ISAAC ASIMOV (about Griswold)

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CINDY GOLDMAN ..... *Editorial Assistant*
RALPH RUBINO ..... *Corporate Art Director*
GERARD HAWKINS ..... *Associate Art Director*
MARIANNE WELDON ..... *Associate Designer*
CARL BARTEE ..... *Director of Manufacturing*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Manager*
LAUREN C. COUNCIL ..... *Production Assistant*
LOUISE MUGAR ..... *Circulation Director, Retail Marketing*
PRISCILLA GARSTON ..... *Circulation Director, Subscriptions*
JAY BRESNEHAN *Circulation Planning Director*
CYNTHIA MANSON *Subsidiary Rights Director*
BARBARA BAZYN .... *Permissions & Contracts Manager*
IRENE BOZOKI ..... *Classified Advertising Manager*
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Editor-in-Chief (1941–1982)

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GET 12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR $1.

GET $155.40 WORTH OF PENTECOST, KEATING, PETERS AND 9 OTHER GREAT WRITERS FOR $1.

As a new member of The Detective Book Club, you'll make your first big killing on our introductory offer: 12 of the best recently-published mysteries for $1.

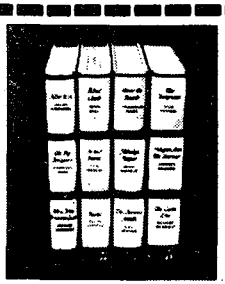
You'll savor baffling murder cases, international intrigue, innocent people caught in a web of evil, terror touched by the supernatural. All served up with the intricate plotting, bizarre twists and gripping action that are the hallmarks of the great modern masters.

Bought in a bookstore, they'd cost $155.40. But as a new member of The Detective Book Club, you get all 12 tales shown for only $1...in four handsome, hardbound, triple-volumes.

As a member, you'll get the Club's free monthly Preview, which describes in advance each month's selections. They're chosen by the Club's editors, who select the best from more than 400 mysteries published each year. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it, within 21 days; there's no minimum number of books you must buy. And you may cancel your membership at any time.

When you accept a club selection, you get three complete, full-length detective novels in one hardcover triple-volume like the ones shown on this page for only $8.95. That's $2.98 per mystery-at least $6 (and sometimes $9 or $10) less than just one costs in the publishers' original editions.

Recent selections have included new thrillers by top names like those featured here, plus Brian Garfield, Dick Francis and many others. Start enjoying the benefits of membership in The Detective Book Club. Send no money now. You'll be billed later for your 12 mysteries. Send the coupon today to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me at once my 4 triple-volumes shown here, containing 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for one week, then will either accept all four volumes for the special new member price of only $1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's monthly Preview, which describes my next selection. I will always have at least ten days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book sent for full credit within 21 days. For each monthly triple-volume I keep, I will send you only $8.95 plus shipping. I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

5-KE
D21M9S

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576.

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PUBLISHED BY
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ESTABLISHED 1923

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only; offer slightly different in Canada.

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DETECTIVERSE

NOT AT HOME ON THE RANGE

by W. M. WOODS

Horse rustler Horatio Holt
Wasn't what you'd call a dolt.
But he stole a stallion and then a mare
And was moving along without a care—
Until he encountered a Colt.

© 1985 by W. M. Woods.

"Q"

A SWITCH IN TIME

by HERBERT KAUFMAN

She smiled as we sat down to dine,
But I noticed her poison my wine.
Not trusting such lasses,
I deftly switched glasses.
She died—and I'm perfectly fine.

© 1985 by Herbert Kaufman.

"Q"

THE LUCK OF THE DRAW

by CHARLES C. HART

A plain old heist
Is nice.
But for pure snobbery
An art-gallery robbery
Is tops
—Unless it draws the cops.

© 1985 by Charles C. Hart.

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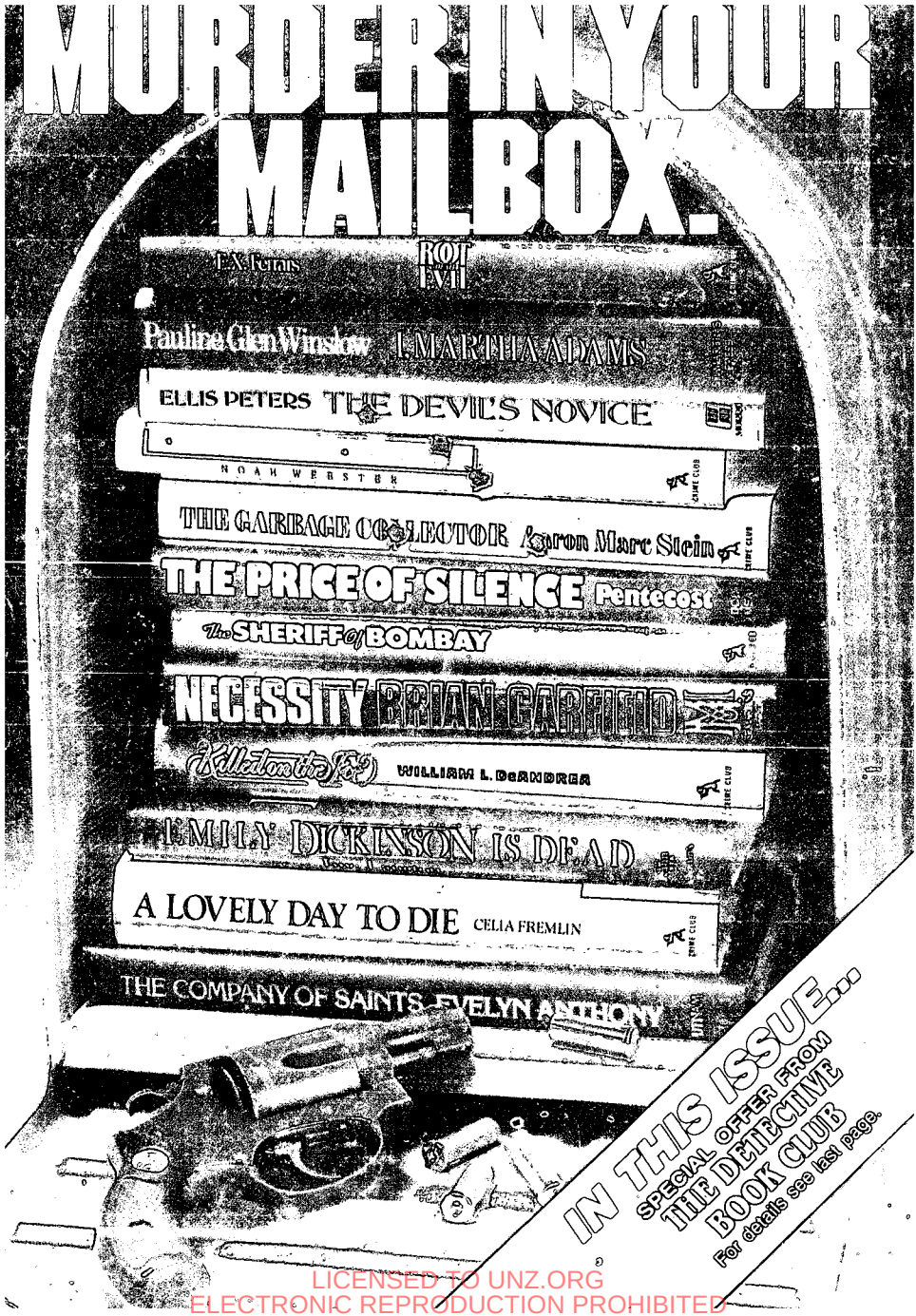
MURDER IN YOUR MAILBOX



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SPECIAL OFFER FROM THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

For details see last page.

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